

About The Holy Bible
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The Subdivision of the Bible and the Problem of Canon.

The word Bible is a Greek word, meaning «books.» This word is used in Greek with the definite article «ta» in the plural form, and this acquires the meaning: «Books, with a certain content.»

This «certain content» is the Divine revelation for people, given in order that they could find the path to salvation, i.e. would become capable of living a mutual life with God, a life which is eternal and joyful, in love for the Creator and for one another.

This objective of the Bible must be remembered while one studies it, for otherwise it will not be clear, why the Bible notes some phenomena and omits others, answers some questions and says nothing about others, which seem to deserve no less attention.

The Bible is a document of the absolute truth. It does not contain a single word which does not correspond to the perfect Divine Truth. All the paternal literature, all the authentic church writings and sermons are the continuation and the development of the Bible teachings, the testimonies of life of the Same Life-Creating Holy Spirit, Who talked to the fathers through the prophets and will talk in the Holy Church of Christ till the end of ages.

An Orthodox Christian cannot be content with the Bible alone, which is what the Protestants want. The more a Christian lives by the Bible, the more It will make him ponder, experience, strive to make real and develop everything set forth in it. The pondering, experiencing, embodiment and development of the Holy Divine Law has always been the content of the lives of the saints of Christ's Church. And an Orthodox Christian cannot «enter into contradiction with the Bible» in anything, whether minor or major, or consider anything in It to be «out-of-date,» something that had lost its power, or incorrect, as the contemporary critics of the Holy Scripture want to assure us of. «*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away*» (Matt. 34:35) and «*Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled*» (Matt. 5:18) said the Lord.

The Bible is the voice of the Holy Spirit. But this voice was heard through human intermediates and by human means. Therefore, the Bible is a book with its own history. It did not appear at once. It was written by many people over a long period of time, in several languages in different countries.

The Bible is divided into the Old and New Testaments. The New Testament contains the fulfillment and completeness of the entire Divine truth, while the Old Testament – the preparatory, pedagogically incomplete unfolding

of it.

Human nature is distorted by sin, which penetrated it through the downfall of our forefathers and increased in the further generations with countless personal sins of people. In order to prepare decayed mankind to accept the Son of God and His Full Divine Law, a most attentive and thoughtful process was necessary. It is that process which the Lord carries out in the Old Testament.

The very appearance of the Old Testament, the gift of the initial Divine Revelation on Mount Sinai, is a rather significant juncture, prepared in its turn by the careful process of Divine selection among people and the fostering of this selection.

Originally, God gave Moses only the first part of the Bible, or the Torah, i.e. «the Law,» consisting of the five books of the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

For a long period of time, only the Pentateuch, or Torah, was the Holy Scripture in the full meaning of the word, God's Word for the Old Testament Church, though immediately after the Torah, the first lines of the subsequent writings appeared, organically proceeding from the original Divine Law. The Book of Joshua began to be written, while the creation of Deuteronomy was coming to an end. The Book of Judges is the continuation of the book of Joshua, and the Books of Kings are the continuation of the book of Judges. The Paralipomenon, i.e. the Chronicles, supplement the books of Kings. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are continuations of the Books of Kings and Paralipomenon. The Books of Ruth, Esther, Judith and Tobit describe individual episodes of the history of the chosen nation. Finally, the books of the Maccabees end the narration of the history of Israel and lead it to the threshold of the coming of Christ.

. Thus, the second section of the Holy Scripture appears, following the Law, which is called the Historic Books, or in the narrow meaning of the word – the Holy History.

The Historic Books are sprinkled with individual poetical works: chants, prayers, psalms, as well as teachings (for example Gen. chap.11, Ex. chap.15, many extracts of Deuteronomy, Judg. Chap. 5, 2 Kings 1and on, Tob. chap.13, and so on and so forth). Later on, chants and teachings grew into whole books, which comprise the third section of the Bible – the Instructive Books, in Hebrew – Ketubim. This section contains the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiasts, Songs of Solomon, the Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach.

Finally, the works of the holy prophets, who acted among the Hebrew people according to the Divine will after the division of the kingdom and the Babylonian captivity, comprise the fourth section of the Holy Books – the

Prophetic Books, in Hebrew called «Nebiim.» This section includes the books of the Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, the Epistle of Jeremiah, Baruch, Prophet Ezekiel, Prophet Daniel, and the 12 Minor Prophets, i.e. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonas, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. This same division of the Bible into *Legislative, Historical, Instructive, and Prophetic* Books, was used in the New Testament, where the Legislative books are the Gospels, the Historical Book – the Acts of the Apostles, the Instructive Books – the Epistles of the Holy Apostles, and the Prophetic Book is the Revelations of St. John the Theologian.

Besides this division, there are also divisions in the Old Testament of the Holy Scripture into Canonic and Non-Canonic books.

The Question about Canon

To clarify this question, we need to recall that, originally, only the Torah-Law, i.e. the five books of Moses, were in the full sense of the word the Holy Scripture, the Law for the Old Testament Church.

The rest of the books now included in the Bible were, for the ancient pious Hebrew, the same continuation of the Law, its development, but not a part of it, like the works of the Apostles, holy fathers, the lives of saints and Patericks are to us, including the works of such contemporary writers as Theophan the Recluse, Father John of Krondstadt, Metropolitan Anthony.

A similar attitude towards the Holy Books in ancient Israel was held until the epoch of the return from Babylonian captivity (500 years B.C). The Samaritans, separated at that time from the Hebrews, accept only the Pentateuch of Moses as the Holy Scripture, though they know some other books of the Bible in an instructional capacity.

Having assimilated this information, we can understand more clearly, how the question about the canon of the Old Testament Church arose, i.e. the question about which of the writings had such high authority that they were put together with the Sinai Law, and which did not. Even for us some of the works of the church writers have more authority, and some – less. This is especially true in relation to the most recent, less glorified by holiness, writers.

The question about canon, i.e. about which of the pious scriptures can be considered to be authentically God-inspired and could be put together with the Torah, occupied the Old Testament Church throughout the last centuries before Christ's Nativity. But the Old Testament Church did not establish any canon, though it did all the preparatory work. One of the stages of this preparatory work is noted in the 2d Book of Maccabees, saying that Nehemiah «*founding a library gathered together the acts of the kings, and the prophets, and of David, and the epistles of the kings*» (2:13). To a greater extent the establishment of a canon was prepared by the process of the selection of books for the translation of the 70 interpreters, which was triumphantly completed collectively by the Old Testament Church.

Both events could somewhat rightly be counted as the establishment of a canon, if we had a list of the books, which righteous Nehemiah collected as holy, or which were selected by the God-chosen interpreters. But we do not have the precise list of either the first or the second.

The separation between the accepted and unaccepted, canonical and non-canonical was established by the Hebrew community only after the rejection of

Christ the Savior by the leaders of the Hebrew people, after the destruction of Jerusalem, on the brink of the 1st and 2nd centuries after the Nativity of Christ, by the council of Jewish rabbis in the city of Jamnia in Palestine. Among the rabbis, the most outstanding were Rabbi Akiba and Gamaliel Junior. They determined the list of 39 books, which they skillfully reduced to 24, combining into one unit the books of Kings, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the 12 books of the Minor Prophets, according to the number of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This list was accepted by the Judean community and introduced in all the synagogues. This is that very «Canon,» according to which the books of the Old Testament are called canonical or non-canonical.

Of course, this canon, established by the Judean community which rejected Christ the Savior and who was therefore no longer the Old Testament Church, losing any right to the Divine legacy, which is the Holy Scripture, – such a canon cannot be obligatory for the Church of Christ.

Nevertheless, the Church took into account the Judaic canon, for example, the list of holy books, which was established by the local Holy Laodicean Council, was obviously composed under the influence of Jamnia list. This list does not include the books of the Maccabees, nor the Tobit, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon or the 3d book of Ezra. But this list does not fully coincide with the list of the Judaic canon, because the list of the Laodicean Council includes the book of the prophet Baruch, the Epistle of Jeremiah and the second book of Ezra, which were excluded by the Judaic canon (in the New Testament, the Laodicean Council did not include the Revelation of St. John the Theologian in the Canon).

But the Laodicean Council did not acquire prevailing importance in the life of the Church. In the determination of its holy books, the Church is led in a much greater degree by the 85th Apostolic Rule and the Epistle of Athanasius the Great, including 50 books of the Old, and 27 books of the New Testament in the contents of the Bible. This broader selection was influenced by the list of books of the 70 interpreters (the Septuagint). However, the Church did not submit to this choice unconditionally, including in its list books, written after the translation of the 70, for example, the Maccabees and the book of Jesus, son of Sirach (Ecclesiastes).

The fact that the so-called «non-canonical» books were accepted by the Church can be seen from their use in church services,, where they are used in the same way as canonical ones, and, for example, the book of the Wisdom of Solomon, rejected by the Judean canon, is the most read book of the Old Testament at church services.

The 11th chapter of the Book of Wisdom of Solomon speaks so

prophetically clearly about the sufferings of Christ, possibly more than any other extract from the Old Testament, other than the book of the Prophet Isaiah. Is it not for that reason that the rabbis, who gathered in Jamnia, rejected this book?

Christ the Savior in the Sermon on the Mount quotes, though without any references, the words from the book of Tobit (compare Tob. 4 with Math. 7:12 and Luke 4:31, Tob. 4 with Luke 14:13), from the book of Sirach (comp. 28 with Math. 6 and Mark 2:25), from the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon (comp. 3 with Math. 13:43). The Apostle John in his Revelations takes the words and images from the book of Tobit (comp. Rev. 21:11–24 with Tob. 13:11–18). In Apostle Paul's Epistles to the Romans (1:21), to the Corinthians (1Cor. 1:20–27; 2:78), to Timothy (1Tim. 1:15), we find the words of the Prophet Baruch. Apostle James has many phrases in common with the book of Jesus, Son of Sirach. The Epistles to the Hebrews of the Apostle Paul and the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon are so similar, that some moderately negative critics considered them to be the works of one and the same author.

All the countless legions of the Christian martyrs of the first centuries were inspired for their exploit by the holiest example of the Maccabees' martyrs, which is described in the second book of Maccabees.

Metropolitan Anthony absolutely precisely determines: «The holy books of the Old Testament are divided into canonical, which are recognized by Christians and Jews, and non-canonical, which only the Christians recognize, but which the Jews have lost» (The Experience of the Christian Orthodox Catechism, page 16)

All this unquestionably testifies to the high authority and Divine inspiration of the holy books of the Bible, which are incorrectly, or to be more precise, ambiguously called non-canonical.

We discussed this question in detail, because Protestantism obediently following the Judean canon, rejects all the books, rejected by the Jews.

The Language of the Bible

The Holy Scripture was originally written in 3 languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

The greater part of the Old Testament is written in Hebrew. The following were written in Aramaic: in the Old Testament, chapters 2–8 of the book of the Prophet Daniel, chapters 4–8 of the 1st book of Ezra and the book of Sirach; and in the New Testament, the Gospel of St. Matthew.

In the Old Testament, the 2d and 3d books of Maccabees, and the entire New Testament, except for the Gospel of Matthew, were written in Greek. Besides this, the Gospel of Matthew, and all the Books of the Old Testament which are not accepted by the Jewish canon, only survived in Greek, while their Hebrew and Aramaic originals were lost.

The first translation of the Holy Scripture known to us was the translation of all the books of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek, which was completed by the so-called 70 (to be more exact, 72) interpreters in the 3d century BC.

oly scripture

Demetrius Phalareus, the learned noble of the Hellenistic Egyptian King Ptolemaios Philadelphus, set a goal to gather all the books, existing in the whole world at the time, in the capital of his king. Judea at that time (284–247 BC) was subject to the Egyptian kings, and Ptolemaios Philadelphus ordered the Jews to send all their existing books to the Alexandrian library, together with their Greek translation. Probably none of the contemporaries understood that this desire of the king and his noble, typical of bibliophiles, to compile the most complete collection of books, would have such an important significance for the spiritual life of mankind.

The Judean high priests treated this task with great seriousness and awareness of their responsibility. In spite of the fact that, by that time, the entire Hebrew nation was concentrated in the single tribe of Judas, and the Judeans could boldly fulfill the wishes of the Egyptian king themselves, however, fully justly and sacredly longing for the participation of all Israel in this task, the spiritual leaders of the Hebrew nation proclaimed a fast and intense prayer among all the people, and called upon the 12 tribes to choose 6 interpreters from each of them, so that they could jointly translate the Holy Scripture into Greek, the language then most widespread.

This translation, which in this way became the fruit of the mutual effort of the Old Testament Church, received the title *the Septuagint*, i.e. the Seventy,

and became the most authoritative narration of the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament for Orthodox Christians.

Considerably later (evidently, around the 1st century BC for the Old Testament part of the Holy Scripture and around the beginning of the 2^d century AD for Its New Testament part) the translation of the Holy Scripture into Syrian appeared, the so-called Peshitta, which coincides in all the most important details with the translation of the Septuagint. For the Syrian Church, and the Eastern churches connected to the Syrian church, the Peshitta is as authoritative as the Septuagint is to us, but in the Western church, the translation done by blessed Jeronim, the so-called Vulgate (which in Latin means exactly the same thing as Peshitta in Aramaic – «simple»), was considered more authoritative than the Hebrew original. This might seem strange, but we shall try to explain it.

By the time Christ the Savior was born, Ancient Hebrew, in which the Law and the majority of the other books of the Old Testament were written, was already a dead language. The Jewish population of Palestine spoke the language, then common to the Semitic tribes of Near Asia – Aramaic. Christ the Savior spoke that language as well. Those few words of Christ, which the Evangelists cite literally: «Talitha cumi» (Mark 5:41); "Abba,» when the Lord addressed God the Father (Mark 5:41); the mortal cry of the Lord on the Cross: «Eloi, Eloi, lama Sabachthani» (Mark 15:34) – are in Aramaic (in the Gospel of Matthew, the words «Eloi, Eloi» – My God, My God) – are given in the Ancient Hebrew form «Ili, Ili,» but the second half of the phrase in both Gospels is given in Aramaic).

When, during the 1st and 2nd centuries, after the storms of the Jewish war and the rebellion of Bar Kochba, the existence of Judeo-Christian communities ceased, then the Holy Scripture in Hebrew disappeared from the Christian backdrop. It pleased God's will, that the Judean community, which rejected Him and thus betrayed its original destiny, received a different assignment, turning out to be the only keeper of the Holy Scripture in the original language, and contrary to its own will, became a witness, that everything that is said by the Church of Christ concerning the ancient prophesies and prototypes of Christ the Savior and about the Divine Fatherly preparation of people for acceptance of the Son of God, is not an invention of Christians, but is the actual truth.

When, after many centuries of separate existence in different and, in addition, deadly warring surroundings, in the Greek and Aramaic translations of the Holy Scripture and in the translations from Greek and Aramaic on one side and the Jewish original on the other, when they all were brought together for comparison, it turned out, that in all the least-bit important things they, with

rare exceptions, **are identical**. This unanimity is a testimony to how carefully the holy text of the Divine words was preserved, how triumphantly mankind justified the Divine confidence, which had entrusted the absolute truth to the infirm and limited human powers.

But if the texts coincide so well in all the main details, then why does the Greek translation remain more authoritative for Orthodox Christians than the Hebrew original? – Because it was kept by Divine grace in the Church of Christ from Apostolic times. When the lines of the Bible were copied by Christian writers, then the writer himself, being a child of the Church, a participant of the Godly Church life, knowing the Truth, did not make grave mistakes in the text being re-written, and the listeners of that text, to whom he passed the copied book, could not ignore anything distorting the significance of the holy words, to which the Church was always so attentive.

The Targums and Other Translations of the Scripture.

Besides the ancient translations of the Scripture, there exist more or less loose interpretations of it in Aramaic, the so called targums, i.e. interpretations.

When the Judeans replaced the ancient Hebrew with Aramaic, the rabbis had to use this language specifically to interpret the Scripture in the synagogues. But they did not want to completely abandon the precious legacy of their fathers – the original of the Divine Law – and therefore, instead of a direct translation, introduced explanatory interpretations in Aramaic. These interpretations are called targums.

The most ancient and famous of the targums are the Babylonian Targum on all the Holy Scripture, which was compiled in the 1st century BC by one rabbi Onkelos, and the Jerusalem targum, written somewhat later, attributed to Joathan ben Uzziel, compiled only on the Torah. Several more, later targums, also exist. Though both of the oldest ones appeared before the Massorite reform, the text, interpreted by them, coincides almost exactly with the Massorite one, first of all, because the targums came out of the same rabbinical milieu, from which the Massorites originated, and secondly, because the text of the targums (which reached us only in the latest rewritings) was subjected to editing by the Massorites.

In this respect, the Samaritan targum is very important. It was compiled in the 10–11th centuries, but takes as its basis for interpretation not the Massorite, but the Pre-Massorite Hebrew text, coinciding with the text of Septuagint in many respects.

In our, Russian Church, we have at hand first-class translations of both variants of the Holy Scripture: the Church Slavonic translation from the Septuagint, and the Russian Synodal one – from the Hebrew text.

The original translation into the Church Slavonic of the Holy Scripture was done by the Equal-to-the-Apostles brothers Cyril and Methodius, but only those parts of the Old Testament text which are included in the church services' readings, the so-called paremias, have survived to this day. In the 16th century, at the start of the Church's battle with the Judaizing heresy, it was discovered that there was no complete Bible in all of Russia. Therefore, Archbishop Gennady of Novgorod ordered the translation of the holy books from the Greek anew. This translation, with many corrections and adaptations, reached us as the contemporary Church-Slavonic Bible.

The Russian translation of the Bible was done from the Hebrew in the 19th century. However, in the good Synodal editions, the more important

divergences from the Septuagint are marked, and the translations from Greek are given in brackets. The Biblical Society editions are done exclusively from the Hebrew text without any variations from the Greek.

Almost simultaneously with the Church Slavonic translation (even later than that), the Holy Scripture was translated into Arabic by Saadia ben Joseph al Fayumi (Saadia Gaon) (in the beginning of the 10th century). This translation was done from the Peshitta.

Such a late translation of the Holy Scripture into Arabic is explained by the fact that Aramaic, which received its most recent and final form in Palmyra among the northern Arabic tribes, was, before the onslaught of the Mohammedans, the literary language of all northern Arabs and Syrians, understandable even to the simple people. The Muslim conquest brought the language of the Southern Arabs to the North, from which the modern Arabic language descended. But, Arabs and Christian Syrians continued to use Aramaic in their church life for a long time, precious for the reason that Christ Himself spoke it.

The Creation of the First Man

«And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness»

The external material world is created and brought forth, the receptacle is ready. The Earth – the material world – is no longer without aspect, or shapeless, but it is still empty, for it does not yet have moral worth, for it is morally reckless, irresponsible.

And so, in order to fill the emptiness, to give moral sense to all creation, to call into existence beings, which are capable of the joy of living, like the angels, in which God delights, the creative Divine word is pronounced: *"Let Us make man."* So that the new creature could be truly kind, it must be similar to its Creator, and therefore the Lord says: *«Make in Our image.»*

Here, in this most important moment of creation, in the moment of calling to existence the God-like creature, which gave moral sense to the whole material world, we again see the holy seal of Trinity on the Biblical lines: *"In **Our** image,"* not Mine, says the Lord.

Being Himself Tri-Hypostatical, united by the perfect Divine love of the Three Hypostases into one Divine Being, He makes His creature, as once He had made angels, not single, but binary, so that they would produce a multitude of persons, but they would all be one being.

"So God created man in his Own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.»

In these verses of the 1st chapter of the Bible, speaking of the original creation of the man, the Hebrew word *"bara"* is used -creating from nothing. Consequently, paraphrasing, we can say about the first Biblical report of man's creation this way: God, One in essence, but Tri-Hypostatic, made man from nothing, in His image and His likeness, man and woman, two persons in one essence, and gave them a blessing to multiply their number and to rule the visible world.

But the creation of man is mentioned in the Bible not once, but twice: the first time in the 1st chapter, the second time in the second, verse 7. *«And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground.»* At first glance, both stories are different: in the first it says that God *"bara,"* i.e. created man from nothing, in His image and likeness; in the second that He *"assa,"* i.e. formed him from the dust of the ground, the same way he formed all the animals, about which it is said *"formed.»* (In Hebrew it is the same verb *"assa"*) *«And out of the ground the LORD God formed...every fowl of the air» (Gen. 2:19).* And just like the

animals, in the 2d chapter of Genesis it is said about man: «*and man became a living soul.*» Further on: in the first narration, God simultaneously creates a man and a woman, two persons, potentially a multitude of persons, similar to the multiple angelic council, in one essence; in the second narration it speaks only about the creation of the man, Adam, and only later his wife, Eve, is formed (*assa*) out of his rib.

This duality was used by the enemies of the Christianity as a «proof» of the fallacy of the Bible and the difference of the origin of the Biblical narrations. Meanwhile, if we remember the truth about man, as a **bi-singular** spiritual/physical creature, then the church's understanding of the two narrations of the Bible about the creation of man would become evident to us, as the description of the different essences of human nature: **spiritual** and **emotional-physical**.

St. Gregory of Nyssa in his work «The Making of Man,» when pointing out the duality of the creation-formation of the man, says: «God created (i.e. "*bara*») the inner man and formed ("*assa*») the external one, the flesh was formed, but the soul was created.»

That is why man, by his corporal nature, is a **part** of the external animalistic-materialistic world. All that is in us exists in the world surrounding us. We are even closer to the living animal world, to these God-created living souls. Therefore, a Christian can very easily agree with the observation that, in their physical nature, a man and a chimpanzee are closer to one another, than a chimpanzee and a marmoset. If speaking of the physical nature of man, then we would not be embarrassed by the possibility of putting man in the modern zoological classification in a designated place in the order of primates, in the class of mammals.

But a Christian cannot suppose that our place in the ranks of creations ends there. No, in spirit we are **God-like** creatures, «a little lower than the angels» (Ps. 8:5–7 and Hebr. 2:7), and a **profound and impassible abyss** exists between us, on the one hand, and the rest of the animal world on the other: fulfilling our resemblance to God, we can get to know the terrestrial animals and the furthest worlds of the universe, similarly to how the Lord knows His creation, but nobody but us, in the boundless material world, can get to know either us, or themselves, or the external or internal world.

St. Anthony the Great says the following about the relationships of the human and animal worlds: «Man mentally comes in contact with the inexpressible Divine power, but physically he is related to animals» (The Teachings, book 2, chap. 42). And more: 'All that grows can be called living, for it is growing and living, but it cannot be said that all of it has a soul. Plants

have a physical life, but do not have souls. Man is called a spiritual, reasoning creature, for he has a spirit (mind) and is able to acquire knowledge. The rest of the animals have breath and souls...There are four different types of living creatures: some are immortal and have souls, such as angels; others have spirit, soul and life, such as people, still others have life and souls, such as animals; and the rest have only life, such as plants» (the same source, chap. 166)

Nemesius of Emessa, a 5th century teacher of the Church, in his work about the «nature of man» writes: «Physically and through the combination of elements, man belongs to lifeless creatures. By the same traits, and also through the ability to grow and multiply, he belongs to plants. He has all these features in common with mute animals, and besides, he is similar to them in his desire to move, in feelings and wishes. And through his reasoning source, he comes in contact with the incorporeal spiritual beings – angels.»

"And God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. (Gen. 1:28–29).

After populating the Earth, introducing into it one, who is the bearer of moral value, the Divine-like spirit, God subdued to him all the matter brought forth by Him previously, fulfilling and developing his Divine similarity. The Ruler of the Universe Himself, the Lord, makes man the ruler of the material and animal world, and, at the same time, makes this material and animal world, which does not have any moral value by itself, the participant of the God-like, morally worthy human life; the inanimate world -as a spacious place for man to live, the world of plants – as food for man, the animal world – as man's kingdom, subservient to him, which he gets to know, discover, understand, name (Gen. 2:20).

"And it was so" (Gen. 1:30).

There was not a trace of evil, everything was wisely arranged, all was perfectly good, in accordance to the Divine will, the Divine plan.

The creation of the world was finished. Through the human, God-like spirit, the Lord bound the whole material and animal world created by Him to Himself, making it a participant of the God-like, light and joyful, right, reasonable and good life. *«And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.» «And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made» (Gen.2:1).*

This seventh day, in which God «rested» from His work, i.e. in which the creative process of forming new creatures ceased, continues until now and will continue till the end of ages.

The Downfall

«And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed» (Gen. 2:8).

Called to the Divine-like and equal-to-the-angels life, and to increasingly greater and closer communication with God, man should not have been distracted from this most important goal by excessive care about himself. The Creator gave him everything that was necessary for life. He also gave man a commandment: «Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it» (Gen. 2:16–17).

As in any act of God, this first commandment has several facets. The freedom of the man is fulfilled in reality: he can obey or disobey. There was no guard at the tree of knowledge of good and evil, like the archangel with a fiery sword later on.

Man was to be trained by that commandment, to grow in love for God. Man, like the angels, was created by God for a blissful life, which is obtained by spiritual growth. Man was created for the development of the feeling of love for his Creator and for beings similar to himself – other people and lower creatures.

But love, as a purely theoretical confession, as a simple statement of fact – is fruitless. Moreover, by not developing, it becomes petrified, atrophies. Love demands its expression, and the most direct, natural display of it is **the fulfillment of a loved one's will**. Therefore, the commandment «do not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil» had the goal **of developing and strengthening the love** of Adam and Eve for their Creator, as well as strengthening their will and improving their morality.

The Church rejects the idea, prevalent since ancient times, that the trying of the fruit from the tree of knowledge should be understood as the carnal communication of Adam and Eve. This communication was not only not forbidden, on the contrary, it was blessed by God, Who said: *Be fruitful and multiply* (Gen. 1:28).

The first people were childishly inexperienced, simple and primitive, more unfamiliar with life than modern children, for children, who do not have personal experience, learn from their parents. Such experience was lacking for the first people, who were taught by the blissful communication with God, but were absolutely naïve and untried. Therefore, they needed a simple and understandable commandment. Such was given by God: ««Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and

evil, thou shalt not eat of it.» In this commandment, we recognize one of the simplest, accessible to all people, and most basic, Church commandments, as ancient as the Church itself – the commandment about abstention, i.e. about fasting.

Why is the forbidden tree called the tree *of the knowledge of good and evil*? Because man came out of the hands of God absolutely clean, not knowing any evil. By eating the forbidden fruit, he would come into contact with evil for the first time, and then could distinguish, from experience, between it and the original good put into him by God. God did not want His beloved creation to know evil from his own experience. Just as good parents try to protect their children from acquaintance with the wickedest and most disgusting sides of life as long as possible, God wished the same for His beloved children.

It is absolutely futile to make suppositions about what the destiny of mankind would be, if there would have been no initiator of evil in the world – the fallen spirit, who rejected God and who hates everything, created by Him. Led by pride, and then by hatred, once an angel of light, he became «*the old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan*» (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). It was he who attempted to sway the new creations of God – people – to the same rebellion against God and disobedience to Him, which he himself performed and towards which he won over a multitude of spirits that fell with him. St. Basil the Great says the following about this: «The devil, seeing that he is excommunicated from the angels, could not watch indifferently, how one Earth-born ascends to angelic merit through successes» (Conversations, 9th, «About how God is not the cause of evil»).

And the serpent said to the wife: «*Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?*» The one, who had rebelled against the Truth, the father of lies, cannot speak the truth. He uses slander in the very first words which man hears from him. He knows that God allowed people to eat from any of the trees, but one. Through slander, the devil wishes to represent this commandment about the only tree as God's ban on all heavenly fruits. Besides this, the slander is so cunningly disguised, that it is not obvious to naïve people. Those who do not read the Bible thoughtfully enough often do not notice where the slander is hidden. In this ancient trick of Satan, we easily recognize the contemporary variants of essentially the same methodology: contemporary anti-religious and anti-Christian forces use it on the government scale, while the same thing happens in complaints at God or in slander at neighbors. This testifies to the lack of creative variety of God's enemy and of the banality of his methods in tempting people throughout many centuries.

And the woman replied to the serpent: «*We мая eat of the fruit of the trees*

of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.»

The fact that Eve enters into the conversation with the serpent, in spite of the fact that she had heard slander at God from him, shows that her love for God had not yet had time to develop, that she is not yet spiritually mature. And in her answer, she obviously succumbs to the deceit of the serpent: she somewhat distorts the words of God as well, exaggerating their strictness. God did not say: *«Do not touch them.»* maybe, if Eve had repeated God's words with absolute precision and truthfulness, the devil would have run away from her, for he hates only the absolute truth of God's words. But he tolerates the distorted half-truth and continues his tempting tactics.

"And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.»

This slander is subtle and very significant. God created people to be God-like and for gradually gaining greater and greater similarity to Him, as St. Basil the Great writes: *«We are creatures, but are called to become gods by grace.»*

Later on, the Son of God will come to the earth in order to make man divine, of which church chants speak many times: *«God became man, so that man would become god.»* Not knowing the Divine plan concerning man, the devil could, nevertheless, guess about it, for God's plan for him was the same, when he was an angel of light. Therefore, Satan knew that the temptation *«ye shall be as gods»* would be attractive to man, who was created for that. But instead of becoming similar to God through love for God and through unity with Him, the devil offers Divine similarity **through rebellion and disobedience** to Him.

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise»

The devil does not know the depths of the human spirit, not yet spoiled by sin, but he understands the spiritual movements on the surface, connected with the physical nature, which can be equally directed towards the good or the evil. And he mobilizes these, as he does everything that he has in his disposal, in this decisive moment of temptation, later repeating his method of tempting millions of millions of times over all human creatures throughout all of the very grievous human history. *»The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life»* – the holy fathers call this the **«triple temptation,»** used by the devil at the dawn of ages in relation to Eve.

«She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat» -A cosmic catastrophe happened, but so simply and,

on the surface, imperceptibly. There was no thundering, the skies did not quake, the mountains did not stir – nothing outwardly reacted to the terrible catastrophe which upset the entire universe, the entire Divine plan for the world created by Him.

But the downfall of each individual is, in essence, the same catastrophe, the same tragedy, and each one of us knows from personal experience, how outwardly simply and insignificantly these catastrophes happen. If we were in need of confirmation of the Divine truth of each word of the holy Divine Revelation, then the simplicity and outward imperceptibility of the description of the catastrophe of the first people's downfall would be one of the most striking proofs that what is in front of us is not a myth.

«And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden ... and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.»

The poison of the downfall was reflected immediately and quite evidently in the self-sense of Adam and Eve. Up till now, association with God was the main joyful content of their lives. It was the reason for which they were created, it was the source of their bliss, for it included in itself all the subsequent pure delights of man: the artistic delights, for God is the Fullness of Beauty; and the joy which we experience, when we see the triumph of a just matter, for God is the Fullness of Truth and Justice; and the joy of scientific creation, which comes from the comprehension of the laws of nature, the Lawgiver of which is God. So, now, with the appearance of God, Adam and Eve, after the downfall, try **to avoid meeting** God for the first time. *«And Adam and his wife hid themselves.»* For people, who have dimmed the image of God in themselves, communication with God becomes burdensome.

Simultaneously they also lost their inherent knowledge of God. Before the downfall, they knew God with the inner consciousness of their Godlike soul and through the association of their spirit with the Spirit, a knowledge which was not yet strengthened, was unformed and therefore easily lost. This association was broken by sin: there is no sin in God, but it appeared in man. That was why man ceased to know God. This is already evident from the fact that Adam and Eve forgot about God's omnipresence and omniscience. They naively tried to hide «amongst the trees» from the All-Seeing Eye. In this obscured notion of God, from the very first moments of the downfall -lies the seed of all the subsequent false teachings – idolatry and heresies, for all of them, in essence, stem from the same mistake: either assigning inappropriate qualities to God, or

negating the perfections, which are inherent to Him.

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? The Lord shows the greatest fatherly leniency towards the sinful irrationality of people. He does not rush to expose or punish them. With the most delicate care, He wishes to call them to repentance. He does not discover the childishly naïve shelter of the sinning people, but calls them to fulfill the act of the acceptance of guilt, calls the man by name. Finally, Adam answers: *«I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.»*

The first weak sign in Adam of a unenthusiastic turn towards the better can be seen in the fact that he responded to the Divine call, and did not stay concealed in his shelter. But even this minor improvement of his he spoils immediately by an attempt to deceive God: *«and I was afraid, because I was naked.»*

The Lord waits, but the man does not admit his sin, does not confess it, and does not repent of it. Meanwhile, it would have been so appropriate and necessary! What a deeply human, familiar to us from personal experience and experience with other people, subtle drama is described for us by the Holy Bible in a few words.

«And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?»

Adam does not confess, he does not show repentance. The leniency of God goes further. As a most careful confessor in relation to the clumsily repenting sinner, God Himself pronounces Adam's fault instead of him, names his sin, leaving to the one, who had sinned, only to say the short, confessional *«Yes!»* Farther and farther goes the Child-loving Father towards the prodigal son.

But, adding to the already committed sins of violation of the Divine love in breaking the simple commandment, the attempt to hide from God, and therefore – to deceive Him, Adam commits one more sin, not only against God, but now against the wretched accomplice of his crime, the wife one in essence with him: *«The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.»*

Piling up crime upon crime, Adam breaks the connection of love with these words – the guarantee of one essence between him and Eve, and makes more profound the rebellion against the Creator, striving to shift part of the guilt for his crime onto Him: *"The woman whom **Thou gavest** to be with me..."*

The Lord then turns from Adam, so as not to multiply his sins, and addresses Eve. Until that moment He had not addressed her, because she, connected by nature with Adam, was one being with him. But by the shifting of his fault onto Eve, Adam breaks his unity with her.

Waiting for repentance at least from Eve, God says to her: «*What is this that thou hast done?*» But she, too, continues with the persistent self-justification, saying: «*The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.*»

The Lord does not ask anything of the serpent – the ancient dragon, called the Devil, the slanderer, who deceives the entire universe (Rev. 12:9). He does not waste a single word in vain with the conscious slanderer, for whose repentance there is no hope. Asking him nothing, the Lord lays a curse on him, which ends with the promise that is terrible for the devil but reassuring to grave, but not hopeless, sinners: «*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel,*» or in the more expressive Slavonic variant, translated from the Greek by the 70 interpreters (the *Septuagint*): «It shall wipe off your head.»

This promise, with which God reassured the sinful people, the Church called **the First Gospel** – the first good news.

"Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken."

God exiling the people who had sinned is, as many other Divine acts, many-faceted. The Bible points out one of the reasons directly: «*Lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.*» Living in heaven is connected with the eating from the tree of life, which made people immortal. Meanwhile, for sinful people with a corrupt nature, such an eternal life in a lasting sinful state and in an ever-deepening moral decomposition would truly be an infernal existence, a source of hopeless tortures and despair. They had to be removed from heaven, so that, as St. Gregory the Theologian says, evil would not become immortal.

The heavenly state was bound to Divine association. Meanwhile, by spiritual law, which we observe in guilty children, association with God, which used to be the source of supreme bliss, became the source of sufferings for our forefathers from the moment of the downfall. As the child, who feels his fault before his parents, no longer wants to be in the same room with them, guilty people tried to hide from God in the same way.

Moreover: we know from the example of children who are at fault before their parents, how harmful it is to let their lack of repentance become entrenched, for they become even more impudent, insolent and shameless. In a similar way, the Lord, in order to prevent their further downfall, casts them out of heaven, for they did not show any signs of repentance.

Before casting them out of heaven, the Lord orders Adam to work. «*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out*

of it wast thou taken.» This commandment of God, as the majority of the acts of God, is many-sided: for together with the punishment for sin **the medicine** for it is also given.

In heaven, people were free from hard labors connected with their physical nature, for the nature they headed obediently fulfilled all the work, concerning their nourishment and service. And such freedom from labors and material worries was morally necessary for man while he remained righteous, in order to have the opportunity to be in continuous association with God.

But as soon as man fell away from God, nature rose up against him. Having violated his calling, he disrupted the whole system of the physical world, having stopped being the connection between it and God. Both plants and animals lost their master and intercessor before the Creator: his rebellion caused «rebellion» on their part.

The time which man could earlier use for his spiritual growth and association with God, he now had to spend on hard labor in order to maintain his physical existence. But if time were not filled this way, life, deprived of the association with God, would become unbearable. When our soul is tormented, then labor is the only balm. For this reason, the Lord commands man to work when He casts him from heaven.

The First Human Generations

The fifth chapter of the book of Genesis opens with a brief repetition of the history of the creation of man (and here again the word «bara» is used – creation from nothing), as the group oneness in multiplicity, in image and likeness a group oneness in the Three-in-One God.

«In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him; Male and female created He them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.» Then Adam's age in years is given, and the description of the birth of Adam and Eve's righteous son- Seth: *«Begot a son in his own likeness, and after his image; and called his name Seth.»*

The Lord created Adam and Eve in His image, after His likeness, and preserving this image and likeness (though harmed by sin), Adam passes them on to his progeny. *«And he begat sons and daughters.»*

If in the previous chapter we noted the exceptional loving attention of the holy fathers to every word of the Bible, then here we shall note, how blind the most recent and little believing critics and researchers of the Holy Scripture are.

In the book of Genesis, in verse 4 of chapter 5, it is clearly written that Adam begat sons and daughters, but contemporary critics are bewildered: how does the Bible represent the multiplication of mankind, if Adam and Eve are said to have only three sons? Whom did they marry? Surely, their sisters, without falling into criminal incest, for such marriages then were dictated purely by necessity, and not in any way by perversion. Besides, mankind was young and fresh then, and marriages between the closest relatives could not introduce the elements of degradation in them, which accompany the incestual relations of later times and present days.

The exceptional longevity of the people of that time can be explained by the same freshness of forces in young mankind. Originally created for eternal life, people of the first human generations did not give into the unnatural, for people, winnowing of death longer. Adam lived for 930 years, Methuselah lived even longer, 969 years.

From among the names of the ten descendents of Adam before the Great Flood, let us focus on Enoch, the seventh after Adam. Enoch means «dedication.» *«And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.»*

Righteous Enoch is mentioned in the Book of Sirach: *«Enoch pleased God, and was translated into paradise, that he мая give repentance to the nations»*

(Sirach 44:15). The Apostle Paul says about him: *«By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him (took him alive to heaven; Hebr. 11:5). And the Apostle Jude even kept the words of righteous Enoch for us, witnessing in his epistle: «And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him»(Jude 1:14–15).*

Blessed Theodorite says that the Lord freed righteous Enoch from death, in order to testify to even ancient, primitive mankind that *«the determination of death is temporary and is subject to extermination.»* Blessed Theodorite ends his interpretation about Enoch with the words, which are appropriate to be quoted: *«So, we know he was translated alive, and that he lives now-we know, but where and how -is unknown, for the Scripture does not say anything about that.»*

A church legend is connected with the name of righteous Enoch, which blessed Ieronim and Augustine describe in the most detail (translation Ep. Ad Marcellam; Aug. De gen. Ad Litt. 11:6) The blessed Righteous Enoch did not taste death. Meanwhile, by Divine determination: *«for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,»* all people have to pass through the gates of death, and we know that even the More Honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare More Glorious than the Seraphim, the Mother of God, passed over the threshold of death, to be resurrected by Her Son and God. The Holy Scripture says that only two people did not face death: righteous Enoch and the Prophet Elijah. About one can say of both of them, using the words of bless Theodorite: *«They are still living, but it is unknown – where and how.»*

When, in the last days, lawlessness will increase, love will dry up, so that faith will become depleted, then there will appear *«two witnesses...the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth»* (Rev. 11:4), which will testify to the Divine truth among corrupt mankind. By God's permission, these two candlesticks will be killed by the Antichrist and will rise on the third day. The Church teaching says that these two candlesticks, these witnesses, will be Sts. Enoch and Elijah – those righteous men of the Old Testament who did not face death, precisely in order to perform the work of God at the end of ages, when the spiritual forces of mankind will be depleted.

The very sermon of the righteous Enoch, as blessed Theodorite says, applies more to the last days than to those preceding the flood: *«Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all.»*

The Problem of Chronology

The problem of Biblical chronology is connected with the 5th chapter of the book of Genesis. It is well known that in Byzantium and pre-Peter the Great Russia, they counted years «from the creation of the world,» not from the Nativity of Christ. Such chronology is found in contemporary church calendars, though it is more and more subject to criticism, for it is known that our earth appeared several billions of years ago.

We can provide two answers for solving this problem. First: precisely what should we understand as the date of «the creation of the world»? According to the words of the prophet Moses, the Apostle Peter and the greatest church interpreter of the Holy Scripture, St. Basil the Great, the epoch of the days of the world's creation should be understood as very prolonged periods of time, because the 7th day, which ended the course of the six days of creation, the Church calls the entire present, on-going period, till the end of the world, when the infinite night-less 8th day will take the place of the 7th.

Consequently, when did the 6th day end and the 7th day begin? According to the sense of the corresponding narration of the book of Genesis we can say: at the time, when the creation of man in the present spirit-bearing state was completed. But precisely when this moment took part in the historical process, we do not know. And it is important to note that none of the historical testimonies about the religious life of man, such as written testimonies, step beyond the limits of what is mentioned in the Bible.

Secondly: the unchangeable word of God, the holy Bible, does not give us any chronological tables. It gives only the ages of the Patriarchs – the descendents of Adam before the Flood and then after the Flood to Abraham. Adding up these years, one pious monk of the Middle Ages, Dionysius Exiguus (the same one, who calculated the year of the Nativity of Christ), calculated the years from the Creation of the World, and this calculation, exclusively **by reason of its convenience**, was accepted in Byzantium, and borrowed from Byzantium by Russia.

But, if we look attentively at the Biblical text, we see that it does not give a precise chronology. In reality, what does the Bible say? «*And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, and after his image; and called his name Seth: And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters: And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years.*» And the same method is applied to every descendant of Adam: the years of their lives are

given, before the birth of the mentioned children and after it.

But in fact, the Biblical expression «X the son of Y» and «Y begat X» do not always mean that this X was his immediate son. In the Old Testament, we see that it is said about almost all the kings of Judea *«he did as David, his father,»* or *«he did not do as David, his father.»* And in the New Testament, Christ the Savior is called the Son of David, the Son of Abraham and the Son of Adam. In the genealogy of the Lord, given by the Apostle Matthew, we see that when the Evangelist says: *«And Ozias begat Joatham,»* he omits 4 generations (compare Matt. 1 and 4 Kings chap. 11 and 15, and 1 Kings 3:10).

Consequently, when the Bible says that Y has son X, we should understand that X is the direct descendant of Y, but how many generations are between them -cannot be asserted. Ozias begat Joatham, but between them are four generations! Christ the Savior is the son of David, but between them there are over 30 generations, Christ the Savior is the son of Abraham, but they have almost 50 generations between them, Christ the Savior is the Son of Adam, but between them is a huge, impossible to even approximately count, multitude of generations. But one thing we know for certain is immutable: if someone in the Holy Bible is called the son of X, then he is his direct descendant. Christ the Savior is the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, the Son of Adam, for He is their direct descendant. This is what is asserted and emphasized by the Holy Scripture, because it is exactly what we need to know in order to see in Christ the authentic Savior of the world, proclaimed to the first people by God.

Thus, **chronological calculations are not part of the Bible's goal**. This, like all scientific or historical research, the Lord leaves to people, who feel called to do such laborious, but non-essential for salvation, occupations.

In order to understand why such a method of numbering the years was convenient for Byzantium, one needs to recall that Byzantium was a cultural and political heiress of both Rome and eastern monarchies, and a difficult task lay before the Byzantium chronologists: for their historical labors, they needed to combine extremely different methods of chronology: the Roman – from the foundation of Rome, the Greek – calculating the Olympiads, as well as the Hellenic-Syrian Era of Seleucids (since 312 AD, look, chap. 1, Mac.) and the most complex calendar systems – the Alexandrian and Babylonian.

The religious motives even then dictated the preference of the era of the Nativity of Christ. According to the church understanding, from the time of the Coming of Christ into the world, He Alone really, in the full meaning of the word, reigns and rules, and the terrestrial kings only rule temporarily. «One King and Lord,» church chants say about the Savior. «Christ is our King» – exclaimed holy martyrs, refusing to submit to the terrestrial kings-tormentors.

That was why it was so natural for the Christian consciousness in countries, where historically the chronology was measured by the number of years of rule of this or that leader, to adopt the chronology according to the years of rule of Christ the Lord – from the day of His Nativity.

But in practice, the era of the Nativity of Christ was not convenient for the Byzantine historians, for the Nativity of Christ was too recent a date at the time. When telling the story of Alexander of Macedonia, Ancient Rome, Pompeii, Caesar, one had to give a year before the Nativity of Christ. This inconvenience can be felt by us, but for us it is rather diminished by the fact that the date of the Nativity of Christ is far enough in the past for us, and this inconvenience becomes inconvenient only while narrating the history of the centuries close to it.

Due to all these reasons, the era calculated by Dionysius Exiguus from the creation of the world was willingly accepted by Byzantine historians, and from them adapted by the Byzantine state. However, very often we find both dates in Byzantine documents: from the creation of the world, and from the Nativity of Christ.

The Flood

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose» (Gen. 6:1–2).

These lines of the Bible have been bewildering since ancient times: who are these «sons of God»- «bne Elogim,» who took the human daughters as wives? In the Pre-Christian epoch, in the ancient targums, the Hebrew Scribes interpreted this extract of the Holy Scripture, as the joining of angels and women (the Targum of Onkelos). But, certainly, such an understanding does not at all coincide with our Christian teaching about angels as incorporeal spirits with no physical traits; it also does not coincide with the belief of our faith, that mankind evolved solely from Adam and Eve. At a time when the ancient pagan legends assigned a Divine or semi-Divine origin to their kings and heroes, the Holy Scriptures from the most ancient times categorically assert the unified descent of all people from common antecedents. That is why even the early fathers of our Church did not accept the rabbinical interpretations of this extract (St. Justin, St. Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Lactancius and Commodian), but taught that «the sons of God» must be understood as the righteous part of mankind.

Truly, the righteous are referred to as of the sons of God even in the Old Testament. For example, in the Wisdom of Solomon: *«How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints!»* (5:5), *«But thy sons not the very teeth of venomous dragons overcame»* (16:10). And the Lord Himself says: *«But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world... are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection»* (Luke 20:36). St. John the Theologian testifies: *«What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.»* And St. John Chrysostom, explaining these words of the Apostle, teaches: *«Anytime, when we do the good, we are born from God, for His seed abides in us»* (Discussion about 1 John, 3:9)

And St. Basil the Great writes: *«Many in the Scriptures are called the sons of God by the words: «I have nourished and brought up children»* (Commentary on Isaiah).

So, in full concordance with the testimony of the Holy Scripture and the teaching of the Lord Himself and holy fathers, we should understand the first lines of chapter 6 of the book of Genesis to be the narration about how

righteous men, seeing the daughters of the unrighteous, were tempted by them.

Taking into consideration that, at the time, mankind consisted of two branches: the descendents of Cain, the first murderer, and the progeny of the righteous Seth, who were the ones who began to appeal to the Lord, we, without any ticklish fantasies, shall understand what this excerpt is talking about: men from the progeny of the righteous Seth began to be fascinated by the women of Cain's descendants and became corrupt because of it.

Why does the Bible continue to call these people, in spite of their downfall, «the sons of God»? – The words of the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon, cited above, explain this: *«Thy sons (i.e. God's)...by whom the uncorrupt light of the law was to be given unto the world»* (18:4). The progeny of Seth – are the sons of God not only because they are righteous themselves, but mostly because, after many centuries would pass, the unfading light of the Divine Law would be given through them to the world, and the Only Perfect Son of God – Jesus Christ – will appear to people.

And the Lord said: *«My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh.»* We can imagine the picture of the internal state of antediluvian mankind thanks to the analogy with the contemporary one, because now we basically see the same thing: people are becoming more and more carnal, they are interested only in the material, while spiritual good freezes in them and even their emotions become dull, and because the corporeal is powerless by itself, the power of evil spirits acts more and more aggressively in ever-increasingly corporeal mankind.

«And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.»

Like angels, the Lord created man so that he could attain a blissful eternal life, as we have said before: *«being Himself Ever-Blissful and Ever-Joyful, He wanted the other creatures to have this joy of life, joy of existence.»*

But mankind sinned, and by that fell away from its calling: instead of blissful immortal life, it gained disastrous and mortal life. But the downfall of mankind was temporary and not hopeless. Adam and Eve repented. Seth was righteous, with Enos they started to call the name of the Lord. Enoch pleased God to the highest degree. In the spiritual depths of mankind, the precious process of the spiritual ripening is occurring, thanks to which the moment approaches when the Son of God – the Savior – will be able to come to people, join them and again make them the heirs of the Kingdom of God.

This process occurs in the best currents of the righteous branch of mankind. This process is precious to the Lord, for His human-loving, salutary goals. But even for its sake, He does not at all deprive man of free will, of free

choice. The process of spiritual ripening occurs in mankind while people, by their own free will, strive to it.

And so, this process in mankind in the antediluvian epoch halts. The sons of God – the descendants of righteous Seth, Enos and Enoch, being righteous (even if comparatively) grew close to the daughters of the cruel and dissolute branch of mankind, the descendants of Cain, and began to be tempted by them. The process of spiritual ripening of the human spirit stops. People became corporeal, without a shadow of spiritual movement, and evil penetrates them without hindrance, all their thoughts and contemplations became evil at all times.

But if the process of spiritual ripening in the souls of people ceases forever, the existence of mankind would become senseless. Truly, for a spirit-bearing creature to be born into the world in order to feel pleasant physical feelings for a number of years, and then, dying, descend into hell without hope of ever being free from this place of agony and tortures – what can be more terrible and senseless than such a prospect? What can be further from the Divine plan for man, as the co-heir of the reign of God, called to eternal joy and bliss? Antediluvian mankind firmly and irrevocably stepped onto the path of moral degeneracy.

But, by that time, there remained only one bright exception in all of mankind: *«Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.»*

Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. In them was concentrated all the hope for the possibility of moral restoration of mankind, and consequently – for the possibility of its moral salvation, its return to God, to Divine eternal bliss.

But if Noah and his children were left among dissolute mankind, they would inevitably become corrupt, would become infected with the common depravity, if not Noah himself and his children, then his grandsons and great-grand-sons would yield to the common corruption, for under the influence of the sinful downfall of the forefathers, human nature became more inclined to evil.

And then the Lord, the Ever-Merciful and Human-Loving Lord, decides on an extreme measure: to exterminate the greater part of mankind, which had lost any meaning in life, in order to preserve the only branch of people which had not yet lost this meaning, and which is capable of spiritual perfection.

And the Lord said: *«I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth.»* So, the Lord decides to exterminate mankind by a flood of waters.

And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.» The Lord sets a time period for people to repent: *«Yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.»*

To save Noah and his family, the Lord commands him: *«Make thee an ark of gopher wood (probably, cypress)... and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh...But with thee will I establish My covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.»*

Let us consider the questions, connected with the narration of the Scripture about the Flood, in detail. This narration is subjected to criticism more often than others.

As one of the testimonies of the immutable truth of this narration let us note the exceptional universality of the legends about it. The French scientist, the very non-religious writer-archeologist François Lenorman, brilliantly testifies to that: *«The flood is not a myth, but a historical fact, for at least three independent racial branches of the ancient civilized world preserved comparable legends about it.»*

[In order to demonstrate to our readers the extent to which legends about the Flood extend, we shall list several nations, among which such legends are noted, at a time which preceded their knowledge of Biblical writings. Two cycles of Babylonian legends about the Flood exist. The well-known tale from cuneiform annals, originating from around the 2d century BC about Utnapishtim, and the legend about Ksinsufr, preserved by the Babylonian-Greek chronicler Berrows. The Syrians: The ancient-Roman writer Lucinian (De Dea Syra) relates the Syrian legend about the flood. Joseph Flavius also speaks of it (Ant. 1,3,6). The Arabs: The Koran mentions the Flood several times. The Suras 54,9 and 69,11 without doubt are inspired by the Biblical narration, but in the Sura 18,59, the ancient Arabic legend, independent of the Bible, is apparently given. The Greeks: The classical legend about Deucalion, the son of Prometheus and his wife Pyrrha. The Persians: The flood is spoken of in the Avesta. (Vendidad 2,46). The Hindus: Three sources speak about the flood: the Satapat-Brahman, Mahabharata and Bhagavat Purana. The Algonquins (North American Indians): First written down by the missionary Per-Le-Jeune in 1634, a legend tells about a muskrat, which found dry land during the Flood. The Aztecs: The known legend about Quetzalcoatl. The Polynesians: on the Hawaiian islands – the legend about the Flood and the ship Tango Loa; on Tahiti – about the flooding of the sun; in New Zealand – about Maui (the

New-Zealand Noah)]

The flood was **for all people**, but not for all territories. Neither Africa, nor southwest Asia, nor Australia, nor America were covered by Flood's waters. The Universal Flood means the death of all mankind and all the living creatures in the places of their inhabitation, but not throughout the planet Earth. One must remember the reason the Lord created the Flood: *«And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth... And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth.»* Consequently, we can fully imagine the Flood in the form of flooding, which covered only the «ecumeni,» i.e. only the space of the earth, inhabited by people, and how large this territory was – we do not know.

At the same time, we should not be troubled by the fact that the Holy Bible speaks about the Flood several times, as spread *"upon the earth."* The Bible and all religious works, concerned only with the care of human souls and not the problems of geography, often call land and universe only the regions, inhabited by people, and sometimes only the region of some definite human culture – the one, which had matured enough to be influenced by the Holy Scripture. Byzantium, brought up on the Bible, called the Mediterranean Sea Basin the Universe, therefore it called its emperors «the rulers of the universe,» and gave the Patriarch of Constantinople the title «universal.»

When was the Flood?

We do not know that. In our previous discussion, we spoke of the impossibility of constructing a chronology on the basis of narration of the book of Genesis. In any case, the flood must refer to a very distant epoch in human history, and the very dispersed legends about it prove that.

The one who writes these lines (to me, personally, by the way, very debatably) considers that the Flood should most likely be assigned to the time period known in science as the boundary between the epoch Mustier and the epoch Orignac, the boundary between the upper and lower Paleolith, when, suddenly and unexpectedly, the previously numerous race of Neanderthal man disappeared from the face of the planet, some traits of which (the absolute absence of burials, consequently, one can presume, the absence of faith in life after death, the absence of any artistic drawings, i.e. contempt towards the feeling of beauty, etc.) correspond to the primary indications of the negative branch of primitive man: *«My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh,»* i.e. without any signs of spiritual life.

Note: Animals which inhabited the place where the flood would happen were taken onto the ark. There was no word about any giraffes, rhinoceroses, etc., which did not live in that area. «And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation. Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens»: ducks, geese, chickens, maybe, swans, storks, etc, with which Mesopotamia is so rich, and besides pigeons and crows. «And it came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were upon the earth. The same day were all the fountains of the great deep (i.e. **the sea and ocean**) broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.» Of course, the expression about the windows of heaven is not literal, but figurative.

The dimensions of Noah's ark coincide with those of the research of Fernando Navvar. During an expedition to the peak of Ararat in 1956, he saw the outlines of the Ark under the eternal ice and brought back part of its frame, made of oak, the age of which was determined by radioactive method to be 5 thousand years old. See the book of F. Navvar in French «J'ai trouve l'arc de Noah,» (I Found Noah's Ark), 1956.

The narration about the flood is very important for all times, in the light of Christ's warning to all of us: *«And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man: They did eat, they drank, they married wives,*

*they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and **the flood** came, and destroyed them all» (Luke 17:26).*

We have already said that the Universal Flood, which destroyed ancient, fallen into deprivation, mankind, in spite of the seeming cruelty of this measure, was an expression of Divine care for mankind. In order to save the last branch of mankind, capable of spiritual revival and perfection, in order to some day, maybe even far away in the future, to become able to inherit heavenly life, in order to save that branch, it was necessary to destroy the rest of corrupted mankind, so that it would not infect the last healthy branch by its moral corruption.

But having destroyed this corrupt majority of mankind by the waters of the Flood, did God forgot about it, did He totally reject those sinners who had turned away from Him? – No, the Merciful and Human-Loving Lord many centuries later recalled His lost sheep! When the appearance of the Son of God to the world and His atonement of mankind occurred, then, as Apostle Peter testifies, the Lord stretched His saving hand into hell to those souls, destroyed by the Flood. *«By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing» (1Pet. 3:19–20).*

Blessed Theophilactus, interpreting these words, says that this means all primitive mankind from the times of Adam. Naturally, here also belongs that generation, which was washed away by the waters of the Flood.

St. Gregory the Theologian reminds us besides (Word 45) that «Christ, appearing to those found in hell, does not save everyone, but those who **believed** in Him.» And though it is hidden from us, who of the common people will be saved and who will perish, we can guess with hope, that a great number of those, miserable, God-forgetting souls destroyed by the Flood, having experienced the torture of hell, made use of the Good News of the Conqueror of Death, and having believed in Him, followed Him into the Reign of His eternal joy.

After the Flood

«And God remembered Noah – The fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained. And the ark rested...upon the mountains of Ararat.»

It is delightful for us, Russians, to pause on these lines, in which for the first time, on the pages of the Bible, an area is mentioned, which later on was destined to be a part of the Russian state.

This is an important region in other aspects. Here, later on, appeared a powerful state, which the Bible calls the land of Ararat (4 Kings 19:37, Ex. 7:38, Jer. 51:27), and contemporary science – the state of Urartu. This state performed a great service to mankind in the field of culture: here for the first time in the 11–12th centuries BC the method of extracting iron out of ore was discovered, and the Iron Age began, with the mass production of objects made of iron. [Till that time mankind used only rare meteorite, chemically more or less pure iron, and to the ancient Babylonians and Egyptians iron was more precious than gold].

The state of Urartu fulfilled another, more spiritual service. With the appearance and wide expansion of the militant Assyrian kingdom, Urartu took the strongest blows of the Assyrians onto itself, and it turned out to be the only state bordering on Assyria, which did not submit to the cruel conquerors. Throughout consecutive numbers of ages, Urartu fought with Assyria, that way diverting the attention and powers of this predatory state onto itself and thus saving other nations from terrible Assyrian slavery. Does this not remind us of the role, which many-many centuries later our Russia played, saving the Christian world from Asiatic conquerors?

Thus, we have reason to say that the Ararat land is blessed.

«And it came to pass at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark... Also he sent forth a dove from him... But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot... And he stayed yet other seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth.» Ever since then, the image of a dove with an olive leaf in its beak became the symbol of Divine goodness and peace with God.

We may guess that the Holy Spirit, appearing at the Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ «as a dove,» thus reminded people about the hour of Divine mercy after the Flood. Thus, outwardly differently, but inwardly similarly, the Lord in

both cases «drowns sin with water» and in both events a dove appears.

And what an onerous blasphemy we feel, that nowadays this holy symbol has become the symbol of the disgusting caricature of peace, the symbol of mendacious propaganda of the enemies of God.

«In the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry... And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and offered burnt offerings on the altar.»

This first offering of mankind rose to God on the blessed land of Ararat, after the punitive anger – the hour of mercy and Divine blessing had come.

It is interesting to compare this short Biblical description of Noah's offering after the Flood with the description, though the nearest one to the Biblical, but still a heathen narration, about the same event in the Babylonian myth.

Babylonian Noah – Utnapishtim tells: [The modern semantologists bring both the names to one: Napishtim and Noepishtim, which means «The Savior of Life,» Noah-Noe is simply «a savior"]:

«When the seventh day came, I took the dove out and set him free, the dove flew away, flew in circles, there was no land, and he came back... I took a crow out and set him free, the crow flew and saw the water drying. He ate, cawed and did not come back. I went into the four winds, and made an offering, I burnt the incense on the peak of a mountain. I set seven and seven censers and spread under them reeds, cedar branches and brushwood. The gods felt the odor; the gods felt the sweet scent, the gods, like flies, gathered above the altar... »

We will not pause on the repulsive image of gods, as flies, gathering above the altar. We understand that the Babylonians did not imagine their gods as flies, as we do not imagine the Holy Spirit as a dove. These are images. But what an attractive image is the one, and how repulsive is the other.

But in the very description of the offering of Utnapishtim our attention is drawn to the difference from the Biblical story. How many unnecessary details we see in the Babylonian story. They do not exist in the Biblical narration. maybe, it happened the way Utnapishtim tells it historically: he put down reeds, cedar branches and brushwood. But all these details do not serve the aim of the Bible to foster human souls. And in this example, we can see how under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the hand of Moses, recording the history of mankind, cleansed the ancient legends, eliminating everything secondary and superfluous from them. When it is necessary, even for a limited historical period, the Bible is able to present the most minute details in its narrative, as,

for example, further on, when recording the rules of Old Testament offerings. When this is not necessary, the Bible, passing over meaningless details, relates only the essence.

From this example, it is clearly seen what we mean when we say that one cannot search for anything extraneous to its goals: neither naturalistic, nor geographical or ethnographical details, if they are superfluous.

In this same example of the two narrations, close in their natural origin (let us remember that Abraham, an antecedent of Moses and the whole Chosen nation, traced his ancestry from Ur of the Chaldees, i.e. Babylon) we see the difference between a narration which had passed through the oven of inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and a narration which is purely human, i.e. natural. We clearly see both their similarity and difference.

«And the LORD said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake... While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.»

Footnote: The City of Ur (contemporary Muge Yir), judging by the inscriptions remaining in it, was a port, which led vast sea trade, but, at the same time, this city is now located more than 70 km from the shore of the Persian Gulf. At the same time, it is known that Tigris and Euphrates flowed into the gulf through separate riverbeds, and now they enter it through one common bed, artificially formed upon the soft, silty soil through stratification. The process of stratification measures about one English mile in 66 years, because of which the country noticeably expands thanks to the Persian Gulf. If Egypt, according to Herodotus, is the gift of the Nile, then Babylon is a similar gift of the Tigris and Euphrates. On the rich, silty soil, rich vegetation was cultivated, which in antiquity made Babylon a synonym for amazing fruitfulness. Herodotus, describing this country, considers it necessary to remark, that he refrains from a detailed depiction of its fruitfulness from fear of awakening distrust in the reader. The date palm-tree gave an inexhaustible supply of national provisions. Bread grains produced harvests 200, sometimes 300-fold.

Noah's Descendants

"And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered.»

Again, the Lord repeats the commandment given to people in heaven. But now he adds something different. The Lord says: *«And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth.»* In heaven it was only said: *«Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.»* Here, because of the changed relations between man – the crown of creation, who because of his sin did not fulfill his designation – and the other creatures, which arose against him because of that, man is given the weapon of fear instead of the former friendly superiority.

And the Lord adds: *«Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you.»* Here the blessing to eat meat is given. This was not originally part of God's plan for man. According to the Divine plan, plants, not animals, were to be food for man. Animals were to serve man as his subjects and helpers. Man, through sin, violated his calling, and because of that, broke his connection with the animal world and the amicable cooperation of animals. Instead of submitting to man and cooperating with him, the stronger animals started attacking people, and the smaller ones began hiding from man, or harming him secretly. The man became imbued with fear of animals, with hostility towards them, entered into battle with the animal world.

Instead of the bright friendly and disinterested relations with animals that predominated in heaven, new relationships with the animal world are introduced after the flood, built upon the lowered moral state of people: mankind starts to see animals as sources of nourishment.

One can only guess that man started to eat meat much earlier, in the antediluvian period of his existence. At least, this is what pre-historic archeological data suggests, testifying that the most ancient people ate meat. But then, it was by the self-will of people who did not know God, and now Divine permission was given to people to do so. We know that later on, the Lord miraculously sent His prophet as food *«bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening»* (3 Kings 17:6). And the very Son of God ate *«a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb»* (Luke, 24:42). And the

Holy Apostolic Rule 51 prescribes: «If someone... refrains from eating meat not for the exploit of abstention, but by reason of disdain, let him reform, or be excommunicated.» The Church, Which esteems fasting so highly, does not approve of vegetarianism as a philosophy.

The difference between the willful meat-eating of primitive man and the God-permitted nourishment of man with meat, is striking, if one delves into its essence. An embittered struggle existed between man and beasts: the terror of predators and merciless unconditional extermination of the herbivorous. Now, maybe in the covetous, but caring looking after the animal world, the domestication and care for animals became possible.

All the bright, kind relations between man and animals: friendship with a dog, the attachment of horses, the care of a shepherd for mules, sheep and goats, the protection of the animal world, which is so highly developed nowadays, but which existed much earlier as well – all this has its roots not so much in the commandment of God, given to people in heaven, but in His new blessing to post-flood mankind.

«And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish My covenant with you, and with your seed after you...neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood...This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you...I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth.»

Is it possible that there had never before been a rainbow? – a skeptical critic would ask. Without a doubt, there was. The Lord does not create it anew. This would contradict the Biblical definition of the seventh day, existing then and lasting till now, as the day when the Lord rested from all his work. But until that time, a rainbow was a simple physical phenomenon, which did not mean anything, such as fata morgana, northern lights, etc. But from that moment, it gained the meaning of a reminder about the covenant between God and people and the whole world. And blessed are the people, who observe this beautiful natural phenomenon with a blissful and joyful feeling.

«And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.»

The English theologian and priest T.C.Chain, a professor at Oxford University, speaking about this extract from the Bible, seriously expresses the opinion that apparently there are two narrations in the Bible about two different Noahs, for the Bible testified that «Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God,» and therefore the proof given here that Noah drank wine are incompatible. We can only smile at that typically

Anglo-Saxon naïve idea, to which indecency is a worse crime than sin. There was no sin there: Noah did not yet know the intoxicating properties of wine. And the fact that a righteous man could drink «an intoxicating beverage,» which shocks the English theologian the most, is absolutely funny to anyone even slightly acquainted with the nations of the Mediterranean culture, for whom wine, often weak, is not a luxury, not an excess, but a daily necessity. Not for nothing does the Lord establish His Holiest Sacrament under the appearance of bread and wine as the most natural products for man. Not for nothing does the righteous Father John of Kronstadt say that the Lord chose the most accessible substances for man for this Holy Sacrament – bread and wine.

«And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.»

The selection of mankind had just been performed, it had just been cleansed from corruption by the waters of the Flood, and only the best things were preserved in it for further history. And now, in the very first generation of the best people saved by God, a new, disgusting type of sin is born – disrespect: the mockery of a son at his father, the inferior at the superior, the impudent scorn towards any authority.

Noah, upon awakening, and hearing what had happened, cursed Ham in his posterity, and blessed Shem and Japheth. The first racial division of mankind is associated with this event.

Abraham, Moses and Elijah

As the Preparers of the Salvation of Mankind

The names of three righteous men: the Patriarch Abraham, God-Seeing Moses and the Prophet Elijah – mark the stages of mankind's spiritual ripening in the Old Testament.

St. Basil the Great says that he cannot look at the depiction of Abraham, sacrificing Isaac, without tears. Really, if one ponders the moral image of righteous Abraham in this matter, our soul cannot but be filled with the most ardent admiration.

Obedying the Divine word, **Abraham** leaves his native city Ur of the Chaldees, which was flourishing culturally, with conveniences for living, everything attractive for life, and goes to a far-away country, which the Lord promises to give to his descendents to rule over: *«in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed»* (Gen. 12:3).

After that migration, many years passed. Abraham, already old, but still childless, asks God: *«LORD God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?... Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir»* (Gen. 15:2–3).

But with what ardent love this powerful and great in his righteousness patriarch is inflamed, when, finally, in his old age, his long-awaited for son Isaac is born! This love is all-embracing: in it, there is the natural attachment of a father to his son, and the joyfully triumphant contemplation of the beginning of the fulfillment of the Divine promises, which were to be fulfilled through this son. Therefore, in the love of Abraham for Isaac, one can see the generation of the elements of perfect love, which will be revealed two thousands years after Abraham through his blessed Grand-daughter in Her relationship to Her Son and God.

And then Abraham takes this beloved son, at the word of God, to slay him, ready to sacrifice him to the Lord God, Whom he loves more than his own life. In addition, the decisiveness to sacrifice his son at God's command – is not a brief elevation of feelings, not simply an ardent burst. For three days Abraham and Isaac walk towards the place of sacrifice, the torturing agony of the sacrificing father, his readiness for this terrible offering, lasts for 72 hours. Really, there can be no human heart so hard that it would not tremble from anxiety while carefully reading this Biblical narration (Gen. 22).

Abraham receives the highest honor which is accessible to man in this exploit of his. According to the church's view, he becomes the prototype of Almighty God Himself- God the Father, Who for the sake of mankind's

salvation sacrifices His Only-Begotten Son. And meek Isaac, carrying the wood for the burnt offering, on which he had to lie down as a sacrifice, humbly questioning the father and being bound by him without complaint – becomes the prototype of Christ the Savior.

The first people sinned through disobedience. Through the exploit of the righteous Abraham and Isaac, their disobedience is conquered with the greatest power and vividness. Human nature ascends to the highest stage of obedience, dictated by the purest love for God – the quality which the Lord wanted to develop in man as the ruling one, in giving him the original commandment. For He created man for the augmentation of submission and love – the Divine-like qualities, which the Son of God later showed in abundance on Earth.

Truly, the Lord brings us to salvation not without our participation, but He chooses from our medium those faithful to Him, whom He makes His co-participants.

But we have the right to ask: why then, if Abraham was brought to such a spiritual height through his exploit, why did he remain only a prototype of the Lord, but did not take part in the real salvation of mankind? Why did not the Lord hurry to descend onto the Mount of Moria, where this tremendous sacrifice was about to be carried out, the way He later descended to the room in Nazareth and the Bethlehem cave? Why did He linger for more than two thousand years to come to people?

In order to answer that question, we should grievously turn our attention from the shining peaks of holiness, which Abraham had attained, to those testimonies of slipping up and infirmities, into which the same great patriarch fell.

We see that, before the birth of Isaac, fearing the Egyptians and Abimelech, Abraham hid behind his wife Sarah and was ready to sacrifice her – the co-participant of his holiest exploits, out of faint-hearted cowardice, and lead a whole nation to Divine punishment (Gen. 12:11, 12). We see Abraham, after the death of his wife Sarah, getting consolation from a handmaiden, Keturah.

Let not any pen, any tongue, judge the greatest and holiest of the Old Testament patriarchs. But, seeing such slips, these human infirmities, we understand that the Lord could not descend to him for the closest unity, could not make him, the way he was, the participant of the Divine life: we see that human nature in Abraham did not yet ripen to accept God. But Abraham participated, like none other, in the process of the preparation of mankind to accept the Lord, in the process of ripening of the opportunity for the Divine-Human life. *«Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and*

was glad – said the Lord – *the son of David, the son of Abraham*» (John 8 and Math. 1:1).

With Abraham, the Lord talked to him in visions at night (Gen. 15:1) or appeared before him in the image of Three Wanderers. Meanwhile, before the downfall, people talked with God face to face, knew Him as a Figure, for they were created to know God in love and obedience to Him. And it was necessary that, even before the Coming of the Lord, people would be given back the possibility to know God, see Him, and recognize Him.

For this, the Lord calls upon one of the descendants of Abraham – the righteous **Moses**, filled with love for his brothers, the co-heirs of the promise, to such an extent, that he abandons his brilliant (by earthly standards) state as the adopted son of a princess, Pharaoh's daughter, as something contemptible and not deserving attention, comes to the defense of an offended countryman-Israelite, and runs from Egypt. If, in Abraham, we see the peak of the Old-Testament love for God, then in Moses, in addition to love for God, which is not less than that of the righteous Abraham, we see the incarnation of the second half of the basic Divine law: **the peak of love for others**, as for oneself.

The Lord greatly elevates Moses among the elect. Among storm and thunder, He gives him His law on Mount Sinai. He talks with Moses face to face, and for the first time after the downfall, the only time before the pre-Golgotha hours, the Lord proclaims a person, in the face of Moses, as His friend: *«If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make Myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold»* (Numb. 12:6–8) and *«And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend»* (Ex.33:11).

Abraham is also called the friend of God in the Old Testament (Is. 41:8), but not during his lifetime, only many centuries after his death.

Using his friendship with God for the realization of his strong love for others as for himself, in the terrible hour of Divine anger for the sin of the Israeli nation, Moses turns to God with a most daring prayer: *«Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written»* (Ex. 32:32).

Footnote: Since the sin of the nation was in violation of the Covenant, then the request of Moses «to forgive their sin» is equal to an appeal: «Do not think the Covenant to be violated, do not reject Israel, do not take away its name and rights of the God-chosen nation.» The necessity for such a request was caused by the following. (chap.11–13) The Lord answered the first appeal of Moses

with the promise not to destroy Israel. In this way, its continued existence was guaranteed. But a similar promise still did not mean that the Jews would remain the God-chosen nation. The very frame of mind of the nation raised doubts, for it not only did not reveal a readiness to return to themselves the mercy of God, but displayed extreme stubbornness, which placed them under the threat of being fully rejected by God. In view of this, Moses begs: 'forgive their sin.» If forgiveness cannot be granted, then he offers his life as a sacrifice: «blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written.»

Moses is the tool of a great Divine act: through him, the Divine law, of which people were deprived after having sinned in Eden, is returned to them; they are given back the possibility of Divine Services, partial communication with God; the earth stops being absolutely alien to heaven. Incompletely, imperfectly, in shades, in images and conjectures, but still, into the terrestrial life comes the uninterrupted process of the preparation of people for the acceptance of the Son of God, through Moses, in the God-given Divine Service. Therefore the Church, in special measure, sees, in Moses, the prototype of Christ, and often in the festal divine services sings chants, which relate to him and to Christ the Lord, comparing them: «The shadow of the law has passed now that grace has come, for as the Bush in flames was not consumed, so as a Virgin You bore a Child and remained a Virgin; instead of a pillar of fire the Sun of righteousness has dawned, instead of Moses – Christ, the salvation of our souls» (Dogmaticon 2nd Tone).

But the Lord could not descend even to Moses in the closest union.

In the hour of his selection, we see him negotiating with the Lord, evoking Divine anger by his persistent unwillingness to follow the Divine call: «*O my LORD, send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send*» (Ex. 4:13, and chap.3 and 4 of Ex.); we see Moses sinning before God by the waters of Meribah in Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin (Num. 20и 27 and Deut. 1и 32:51).

The Lord said to Moses: «*Yet thou shalt see the (promised) land before thee; but thou shalt not go thither unto the land which I give the children of Israel*» (Deut.32:52). The Promised Land was not only a real earthly phenomenon, but it was the prototype of the Kingdom of God, and God's words to Moses are related to both meanings of the Promised Land: the great holy righteous God-Seeing Moses was given the chance to see the Divine-Human life – the tabernacle of God and men, but he was not permitted to enter it.

The third great spiritual figure of Old-Testament mankind is holy prophet **Elijah**.

Unusual power and love for God penetrate all the activity of this greatest of righteous men. In the days of the unrighteous King Ahab and his wife

Jezebel, who became the symbol of everything vicious and wicked, a powerful prophet arises, burning with great zeal for the Lord. By Divine will, he seals the heavens with a single word, as a result of which not a single drop of rain falls onto the whole land of Israel for more than 3 years- as a punishment for idolatry. In his zeal for God, Elijah calls fire down from heaven on a sacrifice to God, so that Israel would cease «floundering,» so that the nation would admit who is the true God: the wicked Baal or the righteous Lord. In the unrestrained, but righteous rage against the tempters and corruptors of the people of God, St. Elijah with the own hand slew the prophets of Baal and Astarte – 450 people! (3 Kings, chap.18).

Righteous Elijah cannot be reproached for anything. His devotion to God is not less than the devotion of Abraham, his forefather. In addition, he had no slip ups, similar to those of Abraham. He is able to communicate with God no less than Moses: the Lord appears to him, as he did to Moses, on the Mount of Horeb, and in the New Testament only these two – Moses and Elijah-from all of Old Testament mankind, were found to be called to see the Tabor light, emanated by the Incarnated Son of God on the day of Transfiguration.

Possibly, one can reproach the Prophet Elijah for the fear of death, when he runs from Jezebel, pursuing him: *«And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life»* (3 Kings. 19:3). But this fear – is an absolutely natural feeling, typical of every man, and the Lord does not reproach His prophet for this fear, because Elijah does nothing unrighteous, opposing the Divine will, under the influence of his fear, even on the scale of the self-initiated blows of Moses upon the rock by the water of Meribah. He only runs from the pursuing Jezebel after he fully completes God's mission.

But Elijah also cannot become the vessel of the Divine incarnation due to the spontaneous unrestrained character of his anger, his all-embracing fiery zeal for the Lord God. This rage, this zeal, differ in spirit in comparison with the Spirit of the One, Who is meek and subdued in His heart. That is why, when the Disciples of Christ, James and John, want to *«command fire to come down from heaven, even as Elias did,»* Christ prohibits them, saying: *«Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them»* (Luke 9:55,56).

The Lord speaks of this with love and delicacy to the Prophet Elijah as well, when He appears to him on the Mount Horeb: *«What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before*

the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice» (3 Kings 19:9–12).

Elijah was «a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD,» but not *a still small voice*. The Lord waited for this *still small voice*, which was not in Elijah, or in mankind, for many more centuries. The Lord, carrying out the salvation of those created by Him in His image, after His likeness, and, consequently, spiritually autocratic creatures, could not come down to men without this *still small voice*, without their participation, for He is not in the wind or fire, but in the breath of a calm breeze.

This breath of quiet wind appeared in mankind, when «*in the sixth month the Angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth... To a Virgin... and the Virgin's name was Mary»* (Luke 1:26–27), and when in answer to the Annunciation, which was more amazing than the one to Abraham, more crucial than the one to Moses, and infinitely much more blissful than the one to Elijah, a quiet voice sounded: «*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word»* (Luke 1:38). This was the moment when the Son of God's descent to man could occur, and it occurred at that same moment, for the Omnipotent Lord, long-sufferingly awaiting many centuries for this moment, did not wait an iota longer, but immediately joined with the human nature created by Him, torn away from Him by sin, but not forgotten by His love, recreating it in the womb of the Ever-Virgin.

Still, Abraham, Moses and Elijah were not left without participation in this matter. The Holy Virgin – was the descendant of Abraham in soul and body. For the sake of Her appearance, he left the flourishing culture and conveniences of his native Ur of the Chaldees. From him, Her forefather, She inherited Her highest flight of sacrificial love for God, shown by Abraham on the mount of Moria in sacrificing his son. This flight of sacrificial love is revealed by Her in an even more elevated way, through Her participation in the salutary sufferings of the Lord on the Mount of Golgotha.

The Virgin Mary grew and was brought up in the Law, given by God through Moses on the holy Mount Sinai, brought up in the temple, built by Divine will through Moses, and She corrected his imperfectness, which caused God's rage by the Bush that Never Burns (Ex.3:2, where the burning bush was a prototype of Virgin Mary), for She did not doubt at all, did not oppose God, Who had chosen Her, but with the humble answer: «*Behold the handmaid of*

the Lord» she effaced the inappropriate lethargy of Moses, who said to God: «*Send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send*» (Ex. 4:13).

By the stirring of a quiet wind, with a still small voice, She rights the scorching storm of Elias's zeal, and Her relative, coming after Her, takes part in this exploit of Hers, the great prophet, who appeared *in the spirit and strength of Elijah*, i.e. in no way inferior to Elijah in Divine zeal. The Prophet John the Baptist, this new Elijah, was not frightened by his contemporary Jezebel, but accepted a martyr's death from her on the border of the Old and New Testaments, in order to become the Forerunner of Jesus Christ even in hell.

The Prophet Elijah was taken to heaven alive, but the church teaching tells us that when, in the last days, the violations of the law will increase and the love of many will fade so, that the manifestation of people's zeal for God will be depleted, then two witnesses will appear, two olives, two candlesticks (Rev. 11:3–4), which will testify to the Divine Truth among the grown-fainthearted mankind, putting fresh heart into the small flock of those who stayed faithful up to the end, embarrassing and exposing the multitudinal, impudently celebrating enemies of God. By Divine permission they – these two candlesticks – will be killed by the Antichrist and will be resurrected on the third day. The church teaching says that these two candlesticks-witnesses will be the saints Enoch and Elijah, those righteous men of the Old Testament who did not taste death, precisely in order to fulfill the act of God at the end of ages, when human forces will be exhausted.

We clearly and painfully feel this terrible depletion of human moral forces now as never before. Does it mean that the hour of the coming of the prophet Elijah and righteous Enoch, as the forerunners of the Second Coming of Christ, is close – we cannot say, and without a doubt believe that sooner or later this will happen, and the earth will still hear the formidable voice, saying: «*As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand... How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him*» (3 Kings 18:15–21). And many, many of the signs of modern days testify that there is little time left until the days when this voice will be heard, and maybe our generation will meet face to face on this earth, in the modern concrete surroundings, with the formidable, fire-breathing Divine prophet, who is called in the church chants «the second Forerunner of the coming of Christ, glorious Elijah.»

The Footnote: The Antichrist, coming out of the dark and infernal places of the earth, to where the devil was banished by the permission of God, will kill them and leave their bodies unburied in the same Jerusalem, ancient and

destroyed, where the Lord had suffered. In this city he will establish his kingdom and royal throne, like David, the Son of whom by His flesh was Christ, our true God, and in that way wanting to prove that he is Christ, fulfilling the prophetic word: «In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen» (Amos 9:11), which the wayward Jews accept and relate to His Coming.

Deluded by the false miracles of the Antichrist and having ineffaceably written him in their hearts, the Jews and pagans will not allow the holy bodies to be buried, and will rejoice over the freedom from the punishments, which they tolerated for their own admonishment.

Lying dead for the same number of days as the number of years their prophetic activity lasted, Enoch and Elijah again, to the fear and horror of those who see it, will ascend to heaven in a fiery chariot – cloud (The Interpretation of the Revelation of St. Andrew, the Archbishop of Caesarea).

Manasseh King of Judea

Among many extremely dramatic personalities, commemorated in the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament, one of the most dramatic is Manasseh – one of the last kings of the southern Hebrew kingdom.

In his time the northern Hebrew kingdom – that of Israel, was already destroyed and conquered by the bloodthirsty Assyrians, Salmanassar and Sargon had already conquered Samaria, taking tens, and maybe hundreds of thousands of Israelites, the cream of the nation, into cruel Assyrian captivity - and moved the pagans from the Aramaic provinces of Assyria into their place. But the southern kingdom -Judea -was still standing. Politically weak, unstable, trembling before all its neighbors, fragmented, weakened, often betraying Its Lord, the Only True God, many times falling into the most disgusting idolatry, already often punished for that by God, losing the greater part of its former possessions, former wealth, former glory, it still bore inner fruits of amazing purity and greatness at this time in particular, spiritual fruits, which it had not borne even in the best periods of its political golden age. In the streets of Jerusalem thundered the voice of the relative of kings, the Holy Prophet of God Isaiah; his almost Evangelical words were already heard: *«Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee,» «How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation.»* His vivid sermon about the coming Savior had rung out: *«But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed»* (Is. 49:15; 52:7; 53:4).

The father of Manasseh, King Hezekiah, was pious. He listened reverently to his relative (an uncle or cousin), the prophet Isaiah, and the Lord gave the king vivid proofs of His power, both in the personal life of the king, and in the destinies of his state: having fallen fatally ill, and having received through the prophet Isaiah notification that his days were numbered, King Hezekiah appealed to God, saying: *«Remember now, O LORD, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight..»* And he cried bitterly. The Prophet Isaiah had not yet left the city, when he heard the Lord's word: *«Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.»*

The Assyrian king Sennacherib, the ruler of the entire Middle East, from the Caucasus to Egypt and from the Mediterranean Sea to India, invades Judea and surrounds Jerusalem, in order to conquer and destroy it, as the northern Jewish capital Samaria and other Israel cities were destroyed. But Hezekiah prays:

«O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: Thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline Thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open Thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God. Incline Thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open Thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God. And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art the LORD, even Thou only.»

And the Lord sends the prophet Isaiah to tell the king:

«Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake.»

«Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned» (Is. 37:33–37).

And Hezekiah, who began his rule in political restraint and poverty, ends it in wealth and glory, both spiritual and terrestrial.

«And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honor: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels. Storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks. Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance: for God had given him substance very much.» (2 Kings 32:27).

Under such impressions, such influences did the early youth of future king Manasseh pass, the youngest and most beloved son of King Hezekiah, the child of his old age. It seemed that one could hope that Manasseh – the son of a pious father – would inherit his piety and continue the business of his father. But that

did not happen. The mother of Manasseh was the Phoenician princess Hephzibah, whose name means, «in her is my delight.» She was lovingly so called by her husband, King Hezekiah, when he in his old age, after God had heard his prayers and gave him 15 years more life, married a young and, one might think, beautiful Phoenician.

The influence of the mother-Phoenician upon Manasseh was extremely pernicious. «Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzibah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.»

The meaning of these deeds of Manasseh was intensified by the fact that the temple of God in Jerusalem at that time was the only temple of True God in the whole world, at a time when the whole earth was filled with heathen temples. And so, Manasseh did not spare the only temple of God, but filled it with Phoenician abominations. The indignation of the Jews, who stayed faithful to God, was particularly aroused because Manasseh «*set a graven image [image of Astarte and her idols] of the grove that he had made in the house*» (2 Kings 21:7). Serving Astarte and her idols (phallos) was connected with the cultural corruption, the cult of prostitution of boys and girls.

«*And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom*» (2 Kings 33:6). The holy prophet Jeremiah recalls this event several centuries later with indignation: «*They have set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to pollute it. And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire*» (Jer.7and 32:34). [The tophet – is a Phoenician word, which means the stone platform, on which stood the idol of Moloch, copper or bronze, inside of which a fire would be set, and when the idol got very hot, on his stretched hands were put children, brought as a sacrifice to Moloch, and were burnt alive. This terrible custom was widespread throughout all Phoenician and Punic cities. Roman writers reported that, in Carthage, hundreds of children were sacrificed to Moloch and goddess Tanit on feast days, both the offspring of prominent Punic families, and children of prisoners of war].

«*Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another*» (2 Kings 21:16).

He ordered the execution of his elderly relative, the spiritual leader of his father, the great prophet Isaiah. The ancient targums, as well as St. Justin the Philosopher («Against Tryphon,» p.120) tell that, exhibiting acute cruelty, Manasseh ordered the prophet of God sawed in half with a wooden saw.

«Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols» (2 Kings 21:11).

Of course, the cruelties and abominations in the beginning of Manasseh's rule, until he still was an adolescent, we can assign to his mother-Phoenician and her servants. But the horror and abomination of Manasseh's acts lasted 45 years, when his mother was long dead. In these abominations passed his youth and mature life, and his old age approached.

Could there be any hope for the change and moral revival of such a man? For he had not sinned out of ignorance: he was the son of a righteous king, he had heard the almost Evangelical sermon of the holy Prophet Isaiah, his relative. And he trampled on everything, he bathed everything in blood and dirty, disgusting impurities. Can such a man repent? For certainly there must be a limit even for the Divine patience. But there is no limit for Divine all-forgiveness. And Manasseh repented.

It is hard to ponder this without inner spiritual anxiety. In our terrible time, which has seen the blood of the righteous, copiously shed in the streets of our settlements and our cities, and seeing even now abominations at every step exceeding the Phoenician ones, we, the children and descendants of righteous fathers and great grandfathers, who have trampled their faith, we by all means need to know that there is no limit to Divine forgiveness, that gates of repentance are shut to none, even to us.

In 647 BC Shamash-shum-ukin, the brother of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, who was to inherit the rule of Babylon, incited a rebellion against his brother, the king, and invited Manasseh, a semi-vassal kinglet in respect to Assyria, to join Babylon as an ally against Assyria. In his turn, Manasseh had to enter into negotiations with other equally semi-vassal kinglets of the Phoenician cities-states, winning them over into the alliance with Shamash-shum-ukin. Manasseh agreed, but acted indecisively. Meanwhile, Ashurbanipal decisively invaded Babylon, routed his rebellious brother, and the latter, being afraid to fall into the hands of his enraged brother, who was famous for his cruelty, burnt his palace and himself in it. Ashurbanipal demanded that Manasseh appear before him in Babylon and give an account of his actions.

The representatives of the Assyrian king arrived in Jerusalem. The

moment was decisive and ominous. The Assyrian king, at the head of his triumphant, victory-bearing troops, animated by success, is in Babylonia, several days march from Judea. If Manasseh does not exhibit submissiveness, Ashurbanipal, invading Judea, would capture the country and Jerusalem. It was hard to believe that the Lord would repeat the miracle for Manasseh, which He had performed for Hezekiah. Even if Manasseh would show submissiveness, then maybe this fate would bypass his country, but for him personally there was almost no hope. Now, for the first time, Manasseh reveals some glimmerings of kindness and courage: a 59-year-old man, on the threshold of old age, he agrees to go to the king of Assyria without resistance.

The messengers of the Assyrian king did not stand on ceremony with him. They *«took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon»* (2 Kings 33:11).

The Assyrian chronicles also speak of this event. In listing the kings defeated by Ashurbanipal, they name «Manasseh, the king of Yagudu» (Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek, Schrader II. 149,239).

Manasseh spent several years in this captivity, we do not know how many exactly, but certainly not less than five.

The Holy Bible narrates: *«And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD His God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, And prayed unto Him: and He was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom»* (2 Kings 33 and 13).

His prayer, composed by him in captivity, reached us, but not in the Hebrew original, which was lost at some point, but in the ancient Greek translation, though it is mentioned in the Hebrew variant of the Holy Scripture (2 Kings 33:19).

It is astounding in its power. (The Russian, Church-Slavonic variants, literally reproduce the Greek text in a word for word translation.)

O Lord, Almighty God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of their righteous seed; who hast made heaven and earth, with all the ornament thereof; who hast bound the sea by the word of Thy commandment; who hast shut up the deep, and sealed it by Thy terrible and glorious name; whom all men fear, and tremble before Thy power; for the majesty of Thy glory cannot be borne, and Thine angry threatening toward sinners is importable: but Thy merciful promise is immeasurable and unsearchable; for Thou art the most high Lord, of great compassion, longsuffering, very merciful, and repentest of the evils of men. Thou, O Lord, according to Thy great goodness hast promised repentance and forgiveness to them that have sinned against Thee: and of Thine infinite mercies hast appointed repentance unto sinners, that they may be saved.

Thou therefore, O Lord, that art the God of the just, hast not appointed repentance to the just, as to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, which have not sinned against Thee; but Thou hast appointed repentance unto me that am a sinner: for I have sinned above the number of the sands of the sea. My transgressions, O Lord, are multiplied: my transgressions are multiplied, and I am not worthy to behold and see the height of heaven for the multitude of mine iniquities. I am bowed down with many iron bands, that I cannot life up mine head, neither have any release: for I have provoked Thy wrath, and done evil before Thee: I did not Thy will, neither kept I Thy commandments: I have set up abominations, and have multiplied offences. Now therefore I bow the knee of mine heart, beseeching thee of grace. I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned, and I acknowledge mine iniquities: wherefore, I humbly beseech Thee, forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and destroy me not with mine iniquities. Be not angry with me for ever, by reserving evil for me; neither condemn me to the lower parts of the earth. For Thou art the God, even the God of them that repent; and in me Thou wilt shew all Thy goodness: for Thou wilt save me, that am unworthy, according to Thy great mercy. Therefore I will praise Thee for ever all the days of my life: for all the powers of the heavens do praise thee, and Thine is the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

From many historical sources, which described those times, we know about dozens and hundreds of prisoners, who suffered in the cruelest Assyrian bondage. Rarely had any nation, even in pagan antiquity, had such an insatiable thirst for tortures and murders. «*It is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few*» – says the prophet Isaiah about Assyria. He calls the Assyrians "*a fierce people.*" And the holy Prophet Nahum calls the capital of Assyria, Nineveh, «*the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery.*»

Many of the proud and cruel statements of the Assyrian kings, about how many countries they had devastated, how many cities they had destroyed, how many people they had killed, made blind, had driven into the bondage, have reached even us. They boast of their cruelty, mercilessness, ruthlessness. Contemporary museums and collections of historic artifacts are filled with these boastful monuments.

Meanwhile, the voice of their victims, those whom they captivated and tortured, is almost not heard, muffled not only by the number of centuries passed, but also by the fact that probably no one came out of the Assyrian bondage alive to tell about their sufferings, and those of the co-prisoners, with only one exception: the exception of the above-mentioned prayer of king Manasseh. Therefore, we can say that in it he speaks not only for himself, but for the hundreds of thousands of those, who, like him, were suffering in the

terrible Assyrian prisons. More than that, he speaks on the behalf of the millions of other prisoners, including the contemporary ones.

When he says: *«I am bowed down with many iron bands, that I cannot life up mine head, neither have any release»* -he does not speak figuratively. He speaks of his real physical state, when he could not lift his head, which was bound by iron chains and bands. And on the contrary, he could only say figuratively that he *«bows the knee of his heart,»* – he could not kneel physically to pray at that time.

For us, as for all the rest of the readers of his astounding prayer, an important and profound figurative meaning is hidden in these definite images, for sin binds and ties man no less severely than the Assyrian prison-guards.

Returning to Jerusalem, Manasseh tried as much as possible to efface the harm which he had done. *«Then Manasseh knew that the LORD He was God... And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city...And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel»* (2 Kings 33:13–16).

It is hard to say why the Assyrians took mercy on him, contrary to their customs. maybe, not having conquered Judea, they thought it wiser to put the man on the Jerusalem throne, who had seen their might and was staggered by their cruel power. And we can guess that it was by Divine will that this greatly sinful and ardently repentant king was freed from these terrible bonds, in order to tell the world about his experience and to pass his impassioned prayer on to all the repenting generations, showing by his example the truth, vital to all people, that there is no limit to Divine All-Forgiveness, and the gates of repentance are shut to no one.

Included as part of Great Compline, and found in all the Christian books of Hours, read in Orthodox churches daily during Great Lent and many times throughout the rest of the year, thanks to this reverberating in hundreds of millions of hearts, this prayer of Manasseh, the king of Judea, composed in the putrid darkness of an Assyrian prison, resounds, of course, infinitely louder than all those boastful monuments of the Assyrian rulers, superficially recalled for just a few minutes by the visitors of museums and the compilers of historical collections, testifying by it that the power of God is accomplished in infirmity from ancient times until now.

The Holy Scripture And Divine Service

As we know, the process of the fulfillment of human salvation is repeated in its basic outline in the daily Divine Services of the Orthodox church: vespers begins with the recollection of the creation of the world, then it reminds us of the downfall of humans, speaks of the repentance of Adam and Eve, about the gift of the Sinai Law, and ends with the prayer of Simeon the God-Receiver. Matins depicts the state of Old Testament mankind before the Coming of Christ the Savior into the world, portrays the grief, hope, and expectations of the people living then, speaks of the Annunciation to the Ever-Holy Virgin Mary and the Nativity of Christ. The Liturgy represents the Savior's entire life from the Bethlehem cave to Golgotha, the Resurrection and Ascension, leading us into reality through symbols and reminders, for in the Holy Communion we partake not of a symbol, but truly of His Very Body, His Very Blood, that Very Body, that Very Blood, Which He gave at the Mystical Supper in the guestchamber of Zion, that Very Body, that Very Blood, Which suffered at Golgotha, Which rose from the tomb and ascended into the heavens.

The repetition of the whole process of mankind's preparation for acceptance of the Lord in the Divine Service, at least in brief, is necessary, because both processes – the historical and official – in essence have one goal: both prepare weak, infirm, indolent, carnal man for the greatest and most terrible event: for meeting Christ – the Son of God – and for uniting with Him. One goal, and the same object – man. Consequently, the path must be one and the same.

In the historical process, the preparation of people for the acceptance of the Son of God is closely intertwined with the Holy Scripture not only because this process is contained in the Scripture, but because people's souls were increasingly prepared for spiritual growth through the Scripture itself from the moment of its appearance, making them capable of meeting Christ. According to church legend, the Most Holy Ever-Virgin Mary was reading the book of the Prophet Isaiah at the time of the Annunciation by the Archangel. In any case, due to Her knowledge of the prophecy of Isaiah, She could understand and accept the Good News. John the Baptist preached the fulfillment of the Scriptures and with words from the Scriptures. His testimony «*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,*» which gave the Lord His first apostles, could be understood by them only in the light of the Scripture.

Naturally, from the very beginning, the process of individual preparation of each separate person to the acceptance of the Son of God, i.e. the Divine

Service, turned out to be closely connected with the same tool of God, by which mankind was historically prepared for the same, i.e. with the Holy Scripture.

The very act of the Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ entering into the world through the Sacrament of Transformation – is a very brief act, as it was brief when it was first performed by Christ Himself in the guestroom of Zion at the Mystical Supper. But everything sacred, everything good in all the preceding history of mankind was used as the mean of preparation to this holy act.

The Mystical Supper is short, the repetition of It in the Divine liturgy is short as well, but the Christian consciousness understands that one should not approach this act, which is the most important in the universe, without worthy, appropriate preparation, for the Lord says in the Scripture: *«Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully.»* And *«For he that eateth and drinketh (the Communion) unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body»* (1Cor. 11:29).

Worthy preparation for the acceptance of the Son of God in the historical process was mainly the Holy Scripture. It, i.e. the careful reverent reading of It, can be equivalent to the preparation for the acceptance of the Son of God in the process of the Divine service.

That is why, from the very beginning of Christian history, the Holy Scripture occupied such an important place in the matter of the preparation of Christians to the Sacrament of the Eucharist and Communion of the Holy Gifts, i.e. in the Divine service, and not only as an imitation of the synagogue, as it is often interpreted.

In the early church, in the very first years of Its existence, in Jerusalem, when the Church consisted primarily of Judeo-Christians, the reading and chanting of the Holy Scripture was performed in the holy language of the Old-Testament church, in ancient Hebrew, though the people, which at that time already spoke Aramaic, almost did not understand this language. In order to explain the Holy Scripture, Its text was interpreted in Aramaic. These interpretations were called targums. In Christianity, targums mean interpretations of the Old Testament in the sense of its fulfillment and making the New Testament whole.

These interpretations of the Old Testament were done by the Holy Apostles themselves, and in the early Church were used in place of the Holy Scripture of the New Testament, which, as such, did not exist yet.

This way, in spite of the absence of New Testament books in the early Church, essentially the Christian Divine service from the very beginning consisted of listening to and learning from the Divine words of both

Testaments. And the interpretations of the Old Testament Scriptures by the very Apostles – the Law, Prophets and Psalms, were the most important part of the preparatory for the Holy Eucharist Divine Service.

Examples of these Christian interpretations on the Old Testament are the sermons of Apostle Peter and the first martyr Stephan, preserved in the Acts of the Apostles.

Later on, when Christians converted from heathens became the majority in the Church, the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament began to be read and explained in Greek, which was commonly understood throughout the known world. Soon the books of the New Testament appeared, first the Epistles of the Apostles, then the Gospels and other Apostolic writings, which were written in Greek as well.

In addition, a providentially important circumstance was the fact that the Apostolic Church had no need to worry about creating a translation of the Old Testament into the new sacred language of the Church – into Greek.

This translation was already prepared by Divine providence beforehand, by the God-inspired deed of the Old Testament Church, which created such a translation of all the holy books of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. This translation is called the translation of the 70, or in Latin – the Septuagint.

The Importance of the Septuagint

We know the history of writing of the Septuagint and believe in this ancient church legend. In the second year of rule of Ptolomaïos, the Second Philadelphus (282 BC), with the blessing of righteous high priest Eleazar, selected translators from the 12 tribes of Israel did this translation. Thanks to this providential matter, the spiritual preparation to the encountering and acceptance of the Son of God spread beyond the Jewish nation and spread throughout the population of the Mediterranean shores, all of which at the time more or less spoke and understood Greek.

The greatness of the significance of the Septuagint in the earliest propagation of Christianity can be seen from the fact that, at the end of the 1st century, an overwhelming majority of those converted into Christianity came not from the Hebrews or the yet unprepared pagans, but from the so-called proselytes, i.e. heathens, familiar with the Old-Testament Law in the Greek translation and who were attracted to it spiritually. This attraction of heathens to the Law occurred through the Jews distributing, among the heathen, the holy books in Greek, i.e. the Septuagint. The main current of the process of the spread of Christianity during the second half of the first century can be imagined thus: heathens, communicating with the Jews, received holy books from them in Greek, read them, were spiritually attracted to these Divine words, searched but could not find either in the books themselves, or among the Jewish interpreters, explanations for many things which remained unclear in the Scriptures. Christian preachers came, and by showing how everything that had been predicted in the Scripture had come to pass and was fulfilled in Christ Jesus, thus found new souls for the Lord. The history of a nobleman of the Queen of Ethiopia, who was enlightened by the Apostle Philip, is an illustration of this process.

We can find indications that conversions into Christianity usually occurred this way during the sermons of the Holy Apostle Paul in the book of Acts: in Antioch of Pisidia the Holy Apostle explains the history of the Old Testament in the Christian light, and «*And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God*» (Acts 13:42–43). «*And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks*

believed» (Acts, 14:1). «Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few» (Acts 17:1–4).

«The Christians accepted the Septuagint as their own version of the Old Testament, and used only it for teaching and defending their faith. In addition, Christians in known measure assigned Divine inspiration to the translation of the Septuagint, because the variations in the translation providentially helped Christian arguments... The Septuagint made it easier for Christian missionary work among heathens. It was that Bible, which the first messengers of the Gospel had in their hands, traveling throughout all the corners of the Roman Empire in the first decades of Christianity, when there were still no books of the New Testament. Ancient Judaism had tilled the furrows for sowing the Evangelical seeds with the Septuagint in the Western world,» – writes A. Daceman in his book «The New Light of the New Testament.»

Seeing what a powerful weapon the Septuagint was for attracting people, whom they already thought to be their followers, to the despised Christianity; the Judaic leaders with all their might began to hate the Septuagint, in spite of the fact that this was the only translation of the holy books, officially approved by the Jewish religious authority and performed as a united task by all 12 tribes of Israel. The Talmud says: «Cursed is the day when the seventy Elders translated the Law into Greek for the Egyptian king. This day is similar to the one, when Israel made the golden calf.»

Therefore, in the second century AD, Judaism makes new translations of the Old Testament books into Greek. These are the translations of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion, done in the second century. In these translations the anti-Christian tendency is very apparent – the attempt to obscure the Messianic places in the Old Testament, make them less clearly relating to Christ the Savior.

At the same time, Judaism started its grandiose work on the reformation of the original of the Holy Scripture – its ancient Hebrew text – in order to establish its stability. This reform, which took place between the 2nd and the 8th centuries, consisted of the fact that the Jewish Scribes, the so-called Massorites, i.e. the keepers of tradition, according to definite samples checked by them, rewrote all the books of the Holy Scripture that were meant to be read

in the synagogues, checked them letter by letter, entering a new system of vowels and punctuation marks. Then, under the fear of herem – a curse, forbade Jews the usage of any of other variants of the Holy Scripture, except for the one checked in this way. In addition, in their work on the Hebrew text, the Massorites also, in all ways, tried to obscure the clarity of the Messianic extracts that had predictions about Christ the Savior.

The battle over the prophesy of St. Isaiah is particularly well-known: «Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son» (7:14). Without a doubt, in the original text here, stood the word «Betula» – Virgin, which has now been confirmed by the newest discovery of the most ancient manuscript of the prophesy of Isaiah near the Dead Sea. The 70 holy interpreters translated the word «Betula» into the Greek word «Parthenos.» Meanwhile, the Jewish scribes in their Massorite variant put instead of the word «Betula-Virgin» the word «ga-alma» – a young woman. The Greek translations of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion here use the word «neanis» – a young woman, in spite of the fact that, in this case, the prophetic words lose all meaning in this extract, which even the ancient Christians apologists pointed out: what kind of a sign can the conception and birth of the son of a young woman be, if it happens daily throughout the whole world?

Thus, the Church of Christ had to choose between the several variants of the Holy Scripture from its inception. And the Church very clearly, without any hesitation, gave preference to the God-inspired translation of the 70, making only one exception: the Church made corrections in the book of the Prophet Daniel according to the translation of Theodotion, for the translation of the 70 noticeably differs too much from the Jewish original. Through this detail, the Church showed once more that It is not bound by anything, even by the authority of Its highly esteemed holy ancient interpreters, but It freely chooses and recognizes Its Holy Scripture.

The Church greatly reveres the translation of the 70 – the Septuagint. St. Irineus thinks that the holy interpreters were as inspired by the Holy Spirit, as were the Prophets and Apostles (Irineus 3, chap.11, 4). St. Justin the Philosopher in his «Address to the Greeks,» Tertullian, St. Cyprian, Blessed Augustine, Clement of Alexandria call the translation of the 70 God-inspired. St. Basil the Great calls it the most famous in the Church.

The Church prefers the translation of the 70, not only to all other translations, but also to the Jewish original of the Old Testament.

The Church does not trust the Jewish original of the Old Testament, to be more exact, the only version still existing – the Massorite one, because during the two thousands of years of Christian history the Hebrew original was kept in

a non-Christian medium, hostile to Christianity, was re-written by non-Christian hands. Even if one does not suspect any ill intentions, these non-Christian copyists still could always make a mistake, not knowing the mysteries of the Christian faith and therefore not understanding the complete meaning of those holy books, which they were rewriting; they could always make a mistake, and, having made it, might not realize it.

On the other hand, the text of the translation of the 70 was kept in a Christian medium, was rewritten by the Christians, knowing the fullness of the meaning of the Holy Scripture, and, what is the most important, – it remained under the continuous control of the Church- the keeper of the Truth, the infallible image of the Holy Spirit.

The Church recognizes that the Septuagint is not only the most authoritative text, but defines the composition of the Holy Scripture according to the Septuagint. The Septuagint completely preserved the Holy Scripture, while the Massorite tradition partly lost it. We talk about the so-called «canonical» and «non-canonical» books of the Old Testament, the canon of which was defined by the council of the Jewish rabbis in Jamnia at the end of the 1st or the beginning of the 2d century AD. Of course, the Church could not accept this canon as Its director, and instead of it, in determining the Divine inspiration of the Holy Books, is directed by Its rules: the 85th Apostolic rule, the 33d rule of the Carthage council, the 60th rule of St. Athanasius the Great, as well as by the ancient church tradition, which considers that 50 books make up the Old Testament of the Holy Scriptures. The Jerusalem local Council of 1672, the decisions of which were confirmed by the concurrent Constantinople council; and signed on behalf of the Russian Church by Its representative Archimandrite Joseph, proclaims: «The non-canonical book, senselessly and deliberately called apocryphal, are an invariable and true part of the Holy Scripture.»

All the Holy Scripture of the New Testament is very closely connected precisely with the Septuagint. Many places in the New Testament books will not be clear, if we use any other variant of the Old Testament. For example, Apostle Paul's reference to Psalm 96:7 in the Epistle to the Hebrews (chap.1, verse 6), where, according to the Massorite tradition, one finds «*worship Him, all ye gods,*» while the Apostle Paul says: «*and let all the angels of God worship Him,*» (Heb.1:6) which is what we find in our text of the Septuagint. When referring to the Massorite text, the reference in the Apostle James' speech in Acts (15:16) to the prophet Amos is not clear. Apostle John's reference «*A bone of Him shall not be broken*» does not exist in the Massorite text in this form (there is a similar one), but they are the precise words found in

the text of the 70 (Ex. 12:10). Also unclear in the Massorite text are the Lord's words in the so-called «First Gospel,» in the promise given to people after the downfall, that «*The woman's seed shall bruise the serpent's head,*» which the Massorites do not have, and many other things.

Not only internally, but also externally, the New Testament in its Greek original is closely connected precisely with the Septuagint.

The entire Holy Scripture of the New Testament is written in the language of the Septuagint. Even the only New Testament book which was not originally written in Greek, the Gospel of St. Matthew, was translated soon after it was written, either by the Evangelist himself or by the Apostle John the Theologian, into the language which we call the language of the Septuagint, for the Septuagint, like any great literary work, created its own language, and all the New Testament books are written in precisely this language, and not any other variation of Greek. And almost all the references in the New Testament to the Old One (except the Gospel of Matthew) are from the text of the Septuagint.

Protestant Biblicists, who do not have any reason to be greatly disposed to the Septuagint, bear witness to the unity of the Septuagint and the New Testament very well, – the famous German Biblicist, E.V. Griffield, and the Head of the Department of the Biblical History and Literature of Sheffield University, F.F. Bruce, referring to Griffield, write: «Only the one, who studies the New Testament in Greek together with the Septuagint, fully understands the unity of the Bible, which he will not get by studying the Old Testament in another version» (F. F. Bruce, *The Old Testament in Greek*).

Together with the New Testament, the Septuagint with its content nourished the entire future life of the Church: Its order of Divine Services, Its teachings to Its children, the laws and rules of the Church and the writings of Its holy fathers.

Let us return to the Divine service. In the translation of the ancient Christian Divine service from Hebrew into Greek another very important change occurred: the chanting style of the majority of the holy text was lost. It was preserved in the Greek text only in those parts of the Old Testament books which were particularly chant-like, which were specially translated rhythmically into Greek and in church practice were called the Old Testament chants, and, of course, the Psalms, which were and remained the main source of the chanting material for the Divine services.

That was why most of the Holy Scripture in Greek was read, and not chanted, during the Divine services; they chanted only the psalms and the Old Testament songs, to which were later added a few chants from the New Testament: the chant of the Theotokos, when She met St. Elizabeth (i.e.

Magnification), the chant of Zechariah on the birth of St. John the Baptist and the chant of St. Simeon the God-Receiver.

Because of the relative scantiness of chanting material in Greek, there appeared the need for new chants for the Divine services. In the earliest Christian times, the angelic hymn «Glory to God in the highest» (the so-called Gloria) was composed, based on the description of their singing in the Gospel, the martyr Athenagor writes the hymn «O Gladsome Light,» and then the Church starts to be filled abundantly with the inspired creations of great church chant-writers.

All these church creations unfailingly used the language, images and thoughts of the Holy Scripture. The law, which we established at the beginning of this essay: the preparation for the encounter and acceptance of the Son of God, which took place in both the historical and liturgical process, but primarily through the Holy Scripture, – this law remains valid. The works of the church chant-writers, both internally and externally, are tightly connected to the Holy Scriptures.

Partly this connection is dictated by the very content of the Divine service. Vespers consists of chanting and the reading of Psalms, which later began to be mixed with chanting of the so-called sticheras, i.e. chants, which are devoted to the celebrated feast, and with readings from parts of the Old Testament books, the so-called paremias. Consequently, more than half of vespers consists of Old Testament material, and new chants are composed in the language of the Holy Scripture, i.e. the language of the Septuagint.

The same can be said about matins, the first half of which also consists of chants and the reading of psalms, and the second half – of singing the so-called Old Testament chants. Nowadays, instead of chanting and reading, this second half is made up of so-called canons, which were originally composed in the form of commentaries to the words of the Old Testament songs. This alone determines the Biblical character of the content and language of the canons. Matins ends with the ancient Christian hymn «Glory to God in the highest.»

Finally, the Liturgy itself is significantly filled with Biblical elements. But, those elements are more adapted in It. The outline of the Liturgy is mostly influenced by the book of the Holy Scripture that is least read in church - Revelations. The pattern of the Liturgy: standing of the clergy around the Altar, entering and exiting the Sanctuary, the terminology of the sacred acts: the Sacrifice, the Lamb, the Throne, the Altar are, on the one hand, reproductions of the ancient Old Testament sacred actions, on the other hand, and in a greater sense, are the reflections of images in Revelations. All the priests' Liturgical exclamations are either a literal reproduction, or a paraphrase of the doxologies

of the Revelation. For example: «*To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen*» (Rev.1:6). «*Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever*» (5:13). «*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things*» (4:11). Many chants of the Liturgy are based on Revelations, for example: «*Holy, Holy, Holy, LORD God Almighty, Which was, and is, and is to come*» (4:8).

All this fills the whole Divine service of the Orthodox Church in the most profound and thorough way with the words, images and thoughts of the Holy Scripture.

We have already pointed out the internal basis for this several times. Now we shall speak about the practical conclusion, which is important for those who would wish to occupy themselves with the holy and joyful, inspiring matter of translating the immeasurable wealth of the Divine service of the Orthodox Church into contemporary Western languages. For that, one needs to plunge first of all into the Biblical form of his mother tongue absolutely and completely. Only then will his translation will be worth its full value, be artistically pure-blooded and will avoid both dangers – the Scyllas and Charybdis of any artistic translation: there will be neither a slavish literal conveyance of a strange text, nor free narration-interpretation, very different from the original, for a translator, filled with the language of the Holy Scripture, will fill his language from the same source, which had nourished the language of those, whose works he translates – the church chant-writers.

That which we said about the connection of the New Testament to the Septuagint, we must repeat concerning the Divine service. Much of it stays unclear to us, if we use any other variant of the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament, but the Septuagint.

For example, the 1st song of the canon of Pentecost says: «The slow of tongue, covered in Divine darkness, proclaimed the law written by God...» An Orthodox person who knows the Holy Scriptures understands that this refers to Moses, because he is called slow of tongue (tongue-tied) in the book of Exodus in the translation of the 70, but not «wordless» as in the Massorite text (Ex. 6:30).

Without knowing the books of Maccabees, we would not understand, for instance, the 8th irmos of the 6th tone: «and with water didst kindle the sacrifices of the Righteous One,» which refers to the event described in the 1st chapter of the 2d book of the Maccabees (and not about the sacrifice of the prophet Elijah, as some think. In the latter case, it would be «kindled sacrifice and water»).

In the 109th Psalm of the Massorite text, one cannot find the words of the Nativity Prokeimenon and verses *«from the womb before the morning star I begot Thee,»* which are taken from the text of the 70.

If we add that the writings of most of the holy fathers of the Eastern Church use the language of the Septuagint, with the same images, hints and indications of its sacred text, then we realize that the words given above of E.V. Greenfield and F.F. Bruce – that for a reader of the Old Testament Holy Scripture in the translation of the 70, and the New Testament in the original, the internal and external unity is revealed more brightly and profoundly – these words can be applied to the whole church domain. For an Orthodox Greek, who knows the Holy Old Testament Scripture in the translation of the 70 and the New Testament in the traditional Church presentation, when he reads the holy fathers, and listens and participates during the Divine services, the fundamental truth of Orthodoxy, that the voice of the Holy Spirit did not cease after the writing of the last lines of the Holy Scripture, that It continues to sound full-strength in all the life of the Church, primarily in the Divine service and creations of Its holy fathers, reveals itself definitely and clearly.

But it turns out that this spiritually enriching realization is accessible not only to Greeks. We, the Orthodox Russians, possess it almost in the same measure, because our Old Testament Holy Scripture in Church Slavonic is strictly church-traditional, and we have the Divine service in the same language, in all senses.

We whole-heartedly want to wish the same to our West-European Orthodox brethren: to read thoroughly, to get used to the God-inspired translation of the 70, to become imbued with its language, its images, to choose the most ecclesiastic, traditional, proven and established by the Church, codes among those of the New Testament, to master this language of the Old and New Testaments, and with this language to translate the whole gigantic wealth of the Orthodox Divine service.

For the one who knows the Biblical language perfectly, this task will be greatly simplified by the fact that the majority of phrases and images in the texts of the Divine services will be familiar to him, as if ready.

But in addition, one more question inevitably arises, equally important as the question of the Septuagint. This question is: which variant of the New Testament must one use, to stay unwaveringly on the church path?

It is known, that even the blessed Ieronim had complained about the multitude of different versions in different manuscripts of the New Testament, saying: *«Tot paene versiones, qout codides»* – there are as many variations as there are codes.

If we look through critical publications scientifically, for example, of Nestle, i.e. pointing out the different versions, we shall see, that literally not one word in the Holy Scripture remains immobile. Actually, the majority of these variations is insignificant: the Lord came «to Capernaum» or «into Capernaum»; His clothes were «like light» or «like snow» during the Transfiguration, etc. But there are also very important differences, for instance, like: whether or not to include the words of Christ «*Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting*» into the Gospel of Matthew; to include in the Gospel of Mark the second half of his narration about the Resurrection of the Lord. In the Gospel of Luke, the malefactor asked the Lord to remember him "in Thy kingdom" or to simply "remember?" Should one include in the Gospel of John the narration about the adulteress, about whom the Lord said to the scribes: «*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her?*» To include or not in the Epistle of John the professing of the Holy Trinity: «*For there are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these Three are One?*»

All these are questions of different versions. The modern Protestant publications solve these problems in different ways: on the basis of the authority of various famous Biblicists, on the basis of accord between the majority of manuscripts, i.e. on the principle of the majority of voices, or on the basis of the greater antiquity of the manuscripts, etc. All these are not our, not church ways.

The question of different versions can be interesting for us as well, but purely historically: knowing what the variations of the text were. The critical publications like that of Nestle, where this question is addressed scientifically and graphically – are useful. But we shall solve this problem, not guided by the testimony of the majority of manuscripts and not by their antiquity, and even less so on the basis of the authority of the non-church Biblicists, but on the basis of the voice of the Church. For us that text of the Holy Scripture and the Old and New Testaments is sinless which belongs to the Church, is accepted by It and exists for Its Divine life.

Using non-church scientific contemporary terminology, we can more or less approximately accept as a church text the group of manuscripts, which is noted by the letter «K,» otherwise called the Keni or Constantinople manuscripts, for these manuscripts in their majority and the samples, from which they were copied, were kept and rewritten under the guidance and control of the Church, while the rest of the groups of manuscripts, marked with the letters «H,» «I'» and «K» (Egyptian, Jerusalem and Western) are the fruits of the labors of individuals and did not receive the sanction of the Church.

In addition, it must be noted that it was precisely the manuscripts of the group «K» that became the basis for the first Greek printed edition, made by Erasmus of Rotterdam in 1516 (only Revelation in this edition was taken from other, unsatisfactory sources). And the edition of Erasmus of Rotterdam under the name «textus receptus» became the source for the majority of the Western-European translations. Later translations in the majority of cases used other originals.

We shall be faithful to the Church ways.

In the spiritual world, there are many roads and paths, but there is only one direct, correct and truthful way- the Church way. It started with the Creation of the world, the repentance of Adam, the exploit of Noah, the calling of Abraham, the history of the Chosen Nation, Christ the Savior, His Holy Apostles, the holy fathers, the exploits of monks and faithfulness of all the children of the Church of Christ, and will continue till the end of ages.

As any friendly family has its own language, its expressions and images, in the same way all the people belonging to this way have their own language, images, legends and traditions: the same language, the same expressions and images from the Creation of the world and the time of the Sinai Law to the present. This language, these images and expressions lends itself to translation into all earthly dialects, if one only searches, cares about it and does not take wrong turns at the forks.

The Bible and Archeology

There is no, and never was, total unity of Biblical and scientific knowledge. The closest that Biblical and scientific ideas ever came was during the holy fathers' times, when such great Christian teachers and fathers of the Church as Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, John of Damascus were also the most scientifically educated people of their time.

Attempts to reach the full unity of religious and scientific knowledge in later times- in the Middle Ages, when both religiousness faded and the level of science dropped, brought only harm to both religion and science.

This does not mean that religion and science are incompatible, as the enemies of religion want to assure us.

But it does mean that religious and scientific knowledge are on different levels of human cognition, because they have different goals and methods. The Holy Scripture has one Goal: the salvation of human souls, their preparation for the acceptance of the Heavenly Kingdom. That is why the Holy Scripture is destined equally for all times. Man needs to know equally, in all times, that he, like everything in the world, is created by the Lord God, but contrary to the rest of the terrestrial world – material and spiritual, he, in his spirit, is created in the image and likeness of God, that all people originated from one couple or even from one being, that the first pair of people sinned gravely, but that they also lay down the foundation for repentance and correction.

That the original mankind became so corrupt that the Lord had to destroy it by the waters of the Flood, keeping only the righteous Noah and his family, from whom he restored mankind again; that among the descendants of the righteous Noah were many sinners, but there were the righteous, too; that one of these righteous became the antecedent of the Chosen nation, from among whom proceeded the Savior of the world – Christ.

All these things a Christian should know in order to believe correctly and to be prepared to defend the faith. With good reason, Christ Himself referred to these facts from the book of Genesis (Matt. 19:4, 24, 38; Mark 10etc.).

The Holy Scripture does not give any anthropological or archeological facts. They are not necessary for the matter of salvation of human souls.

That is why to your question, how should one picture the first people according to the Bible: beautiful, as they are drawn in Biblical illustrations, or like those monkey-like beasts as they are depicted in popular anthropology books, we will not find the answer in the Holy Scripture, for the knowledge of all this is not necessary for the soul and the pastoral tasks of the Church.

But this does not at all mean that this question is not legitimate and that you have no right to ask it.

A Christian has an inalienable right to be interested in all questions. Those who assert that one should believe simply, without asking questions, are wrong. There are often indifference and a cold attitude towards faith hiding behind such affirmations.

The Apostle Peter teaches us: *«Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear»* (1Pet.3:15). And the Apostle Paul confirms: *«Ye may know how ye ought to answer every man»* (Col.4:6). So, the question needs to be answered: how to picture the first people in a Christian way?

But one should search for the answer to this question in the same way that all questions outside the Church are answered: scientific, economic, municipal – not in the lines of the Bible, but in the free conclusions of the human mind, to which the Lord grants freedom, not prescribing how to conduct scientific research, nor how to trade or to build a state.

In addition, the Church demands from a Christian only one thing – that every one of these actions he should fulfill honestly, i.e. that he should strive to find the scientific truth in the scientific field, not the conclusions imposed on him by extraneous views.

Contemporary materialistic science both in our Motherland, and in the Western world, sins gravely not in posing questions and asserting hypotheses, which sometimes seem incompatible with Christian truths, – but because it does not explore these contradictions conscientiously, striving not to establishing truth, but to causing as much harm to Christianity as possible.

In addition, such warriors of anti-Christianity often display flagrant ignorance of the Holy Scripture and matters of faith on the whole.

For example, the one-time leader of the militant atheists E. Yaroslavsky once mocked the Biblical text, using the opportunity that his listeners, who had at one time had lessons in the Divine Law, but unfortunately knew the Bible very poorly; he asserted that in the Bible it is not clear, whom the sons of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, married, because, besides them, no one else is mentioned in the Bible, though it is clearly written there that Adam and Eve begat sons and daughters (Gen. 5:4).

There certainly cannot be any fundamental incompatibility between truthful scientific data and the data of the Bible. The laws of nature, which are studied by science, and the truths of the Holy Scripture, belong to One and the Same Law-Giver, Creator and Thinker, Who does not contradict Himself.

But I shall repeat again: there can be no full concurrence between the

former and latter data, not only for the above-mentioned cause, but also because religious truths are given once and forever for all people, and for entire variety of cultural level. But scientific truths are accessible only to people with special preparation and undergo changes all the time, depending on newer and newer conclusions of science.

One cannot draw connections between the motionless rock and the fast flowing river. Let us remember that if the mendacious, God-opposing statements of materialistic science are criminal, then, the opposite ideas, instilled upon science, seemingly dictated by the interests of the protection of the Bible, are not useful.

The Bible does not need protection and «confirmation.» But science needs absolute freedom in its conclusions.

Of course, the conjectures, given for the protection and «confirmation» of the Bible are less bad than the malicious tricks of atheists, but they too can cause harm.

How much harm was caused by the censure Copernicus' theory of the universe or Darwin's theory of evolution. There should have been no rush to censure them, particularly, because the originators of these theories were believing persons. Copernicus was a church warden in his Anglican parish.

I shall mention, along the way, the more or less known cases of the harmful application of scientific terms to the Biblical text.

In the Biblical narration about the Holy Prophet Elijah in the original, in the Hebrew text, it is said that he was swallowed by a «big fish,» in Hebrew «dag gadol.» In the translation of this text into the modern languages, instead of «big fish,» «a whale» was used, for according to ancient scientific supposition, a whale is considered the biggest fish. This idea was preserved till the middle of the 19th century, and even in the English zoology of O. Goldsmith, published in 1857, whales are assigned to the class of fishes.

And to how many mockeries was the Church submitted because of this unfortunate change of the word, how many unstable souls hesitated and doubted.

The same can be said about the word «hare» in the Pentateuch of Moses. In Hebrew, the word «shafan» is used here. This is a small hoofed animal, which in Russian zoology is called daman, and in English hyrax. It inhabits Syria and Africa.

In the translation, according to the zoological terminology of the time, they were called hares. In our time the enemies of the Church, of course, did not miss an opportunity to laugh at the holy Biblical text, in which it is said: «Nevertheless these ye shall not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that

divide the cloven hoof; as the camel, and the hare...» (Deut. 14:7) A hare, of course, does not have hoofs, but a hyrax has 3 small hoofs on each pad.

But let us get back to your questions: what did the first people look like, and who exactly of the known to science pre-human and the earliest types of man can be called people, from our Christian point of view?

As I have already stated twice, comparing scientific data and the truths of the Holy Scripture is unsafe. But, if we do it humbly, carefully and not obsessively, then maybe, we shall not sin, but on the contrary, have a useful discussion.

While seeking a method to apply to this matter, I remembered that, essentially, the same problem had to be solved by the Europeans in the era of great discoveries. And then the following question: which of the newly discovered people-like creatures – are people, and who are not, had to be solved not only theoretically, but practically as well.

In Africa, they met gorillas and chimpanzees, in Asia – gibbons and orangutans (which in Malaysian means «forest man»). Were these people or monkeys? Physically, (especially the recently discovered species Bonobo) they are extremely similar to humans. But they do not talk – they are speechless; no spiritual life has been revealed in them. That means that they are not human.

When the Spanish and Englishmen met red-skinned Indians in America, they also did not immediately comprehend, who was before them: humans or not?

The Spanish applied the right method: they began to ask the Indians, if they believed in a Deity and life after death? Being convinced that the Indians believed in both, the Spanish recognized them as human and took all sorts of pains to convert them to Christianity.

The English, on the other hand, basing their decision on the lack of physical similarity between the Indians and white-skinned Europeans and on their hostility towards the newcomers, refused to recognize them as humans, did not try to convert them to Christianity and hunted them like wild animals.

This method is incorrect.

The question, which of the given creatures are people, and which are not, is solved not by the external, but by the internal features. All zoologists and anthropologists will agree with this. But if for zoologists and anthropologists the internal features are the details of the skeletal composition, digestive and nervous systems, then for us, Christians, even these features are external, and the proposed question we shall solve without them. Spiritual features are the definitive ones for us.

Let us apply the Spanish methods to pre-historic anthropology. If we

cannot ask the ancient fossil pre-humans and humans: «What do you believe in?» then we can attentively look at their remains from precisely this point of view.

The Driopithecus, Australopithecus and similar creatures are surely not human, in spite of their unquestionable resemblance to humans. Bonobo is somewhat farther from man in body structure, and still he is not human, but a monkey.

The definitive consideration for us is that no traces of spiritual processes were found in either Driopithecus or Australopithecus.

The same can be said about the Pithecanthropus and Sinanthropus (both of them are now called Homo Erectus), and even about the Heidelberg man. About all of them it is said in the American manual on paleo-anthropology of M. Day: «Their brain measured between 850 and 1200 c.c. in volume (the brain of contemporary man is approximately 1300 c.c.), and as far as can be judged by the structure of their legs, they walked upright... Apparently, they had everything necessary to start producing the beginnings of a language. But there are no signs that any of the Pithecanthropus possessed speech.»

The Neanderthal is next on the list of the pre-human stages. Is he a human? He used fire, made stone tools. All this seems to compel us to see him as a human. K. Marx and Engels assert that it is the creation of tools that make pre-man, man. And nevertheless, there is no final assurance that the Neanderthal is human.

No signs of spirituality or inspiration are noted in him: we see no works of any, even the most primitive, art, no attempts to decorate his tools or abode in the comparatively numerous remnants of the Neanderthals.

And as far as primitive tools are concerned, they can be made even by a chimpanzee (not even a Bonobo), as J. Goodall testifies, who observed chimpanzees for 9 years.

And only with the coming of the next period, with the shift from the lower Paleolith into the upper, with the replacement of the Neanderthal by the Cro-magnon, we can unhesitatingly state that we have before us a human. The sense of beauty is present in him.

Sometimes he draws highly artistic drawings on the walls of caves, in which he dwells, he decorates his tools, he buries the dead, which means that he believes in life after death. There are before us unquestionable signs of not only emotional, but spiritual movements. On the basis of all this we, according to our methodology, can assert without a shadow of a doubt, that the Cro-magnon is the possessor of the eternal human spirit, created in God's image and likeness

But if this is so, then your first question can be answered completely affirmatively. The first people were very attractive. All scientific researchers draw the Cro-magnon as beautiful. The average size of his brain is not less, and is maybe even larger than the average size of the brain of contemporary man. His artistic works in the caves of France and Spain arouse the unanimous admiration of all people, who love beauty at least a little. Not in vain are the caves of Lascaux and Altamira often called the Sistine Chapels of the Paleolithic Era.

But we shall not rush to assert that our idea is absolutely correct. I said several times, and repeat again, that the comparison of religious and scientific facts is very questionable.

Giordano Bruno was burned by the Catholics not because he suggested the possibility of people living on other planets, but because he stated that as an absolute truth, by his logic: if God created many worlds, then He had to inhabit them with reasonable creatures. And he demanded the acceptance of this truth as an absolute, of the Pope of Rome and of all the Catholic bishops.

His teaching was accepted to be heretical, and he was burned. But now we clearly see, what harm his teaching could have caused, if it had been accepted by the Christian consciousness as an absolute religious truth.

They will not burn us for our statements. Now they burn for other things. But we, too, can do harm to the church consciousness by making our statements absolute.

So, let us be humble, let us not make the idea absolute, that Adam and Eve and the first generations of people belonged to the race, which pre-historic anthropology calls the Cro-Magnons.

All the more so, that I have another opportunity of comparing Biblical and scientific data in this field.

Before the epoch of Cro-magnons, the most predominant and widespread type of humans or pre-humans were Neanderthals. The forerunners of Cro-magnons lived next to them. From the discoveries on Mount Carmel, we know that these two races of mankind intermixed and bore full-fledged progeny.

Neanderthals made tools, knew how to use fire, but did not show any spiritual processes. Originally they were much more numerous than Cro-magnons. But all of a sudden and totally inexplicably, from a scientific point of view, both Neanderthals and their mixed offspring with the Cro-magnons disappeared without a trace. Not a drop of Neanderthal blood could be found in later generations.

Thus, there was a time, when two types of mankind existed simultaneously. This can disturb some. But if we take a good look at the

Biblical lines, we notice that two types of original mankind are mentioned in them: the sons of God and sons of men, the descendants of Seth and Cain.

The intermixing of these two types is also mentioned. And the Lord characterizes both the offspring of Cain and the mixed offspring of Seth with the following words: «*My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh,*» Only flesh, there is nothing spiritual in them.

Oh, we know this state of mankind well, from present times. And it can fully correspond with the representation which we create of Neanderthals

The waters of the Flood exterminated these exclusively corporal people, so that none of their progeny was left. Only the righteous Noah and his family were saved. Not a single drop of the sinful variant of mankind's blood was in him. And the first generations of his descendants (in spite of the presence of Ham), we can imagine as spiritually and physically renewed, fresh, outwardly attractive, emotionally enriched, capable of producing the beautiful creations of Lascaux and Altamira.

But I repeat again: let us not make these comparisons absolute.

In conclusion, I consider it to be my duty to extend beyond the limits outlined by you topics and tell you in brief, why our merciful and man-loving Lord destroyed all of pre-Flood mankind. I remember that the Gustav Dore's picture of the Universal Flood upset me greatly in my childhood.

For a correct understanding of this question, one should step off the unstable soil of scientific theories onto the firm soil of Christian understandings. The Lord wants to save, i.e. to make all people the participants of the Heavenly Kingdom. But people are created free in the image and likeness of God, and that is why their salvation is possible only with their own participation in it, even if miniscule.

After the downfall of the first people, the Lord immediately began their preparation for the matter of their salvation. Adam and Eve took part in that: they started repenting. Cain, through his crime and non-repentance, rejected this path. His descendants and the descendants of Seth, which intermixed with them, showed no repentance and became completely corporal.

It seemed that the Divine plan for the salvation of people was absolutely ruined. People were born, lived an absolutely unspiritual, purely physical life, and dying, descended to hell without any hope of ever being freed from there. What could be more senseless and opposed to the Divine plan for people?!

Only one righteous man was left, Noah, and his family shared his righteousness. But if they have stayed among corrupt people, then in one or two generations they would have been corrupted too.

But the Lord destroyed hopelessly dissolute mankind and saved Noah and

his family, and in them the guarantee of the possibility of salvation for all people.

I remember what a joyful revelation it was for me in my youth, when I read the lines of Apostle Peter's Epistle about how the Lord did not forget the pre-Flood mankind that He had destroyed, did not scorn those souls, but led them out of hell when the plan of mankind's salvation, secured through their destruction, had ripened.

The Apostle Peter writes: *«For Christ also hath once suffered for sins...By which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water» (1Pet. 3:18–20).*

Thus, fulfilling the commandment of same Apostle Peter, according to his word *«be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.»*

The Ancient Mesopotamian Notes and Narrations of the Holy Bible

In 1872, the famous English Assyriologist George Smith, who earned the title of founder of the British Assyriology, reported that among the cuneiform tablets, which were brought to the British Museum from the library of the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, he discovered an ancient Babylonian legend about the Universal Flood, which greatly corresponded to the Biblical narration of it.

The enemies of our faith, which even then were numerous, and which had significant influence over social and scientific circles, readily snatched up this news and interpreted it as a testimony of the non-independence of the Biblical Scriptures and their full dependence on the ancient Mesopotamian legends. Most of the Christian apologetics, defending the irreproachable truth and the originality of the Holy Scripture, tried to disparage the new discovery by calling it unreliable. But new discoveries in Mesopotamia only proved the authenticity of G. Smith's discovery. New versions of the legend about the Flood appeared not only in the Babylonian (Akkadian) language, but in the most ancient one – Sumerian (in the town of Nippur), then ancient translations of this legend (before 1700 BC) appeared in the Hittite and Horite (Hurrian) languages, so that the authenticity of the legend about the Flood in the Mesopotamian cuneiform was confirmed.

The Holy Scripture does not say how it was written. The holy fathers spoke differently concerning this question, but they all unanimously agreed, as the Apostle Paul said, "*All **Scripture** is given by inspiration of God,*" (2Tim. 3:16) i.e. was compiled with the participation of the Holy Spirit. But some of the holy fathers think that the holy words of the Bible were not written before the Holy Spirit directly dictated them to holy prophet Moses, who conveyed them in this form in our holy books. But then, with this notion, everything in the Holy Scripture, including punctuation and division into verses, is God-inspired and holy. Any translation of the holy books can then easily upset the Divine inspiration. Then it becomes clear, why only three languages were considered legitimate for translating the Holy Scriptures in the Middle Ages.

Another opinion predominated among the holy fathers, mainly among those, who had to deal with translations of the Holy Scripture into different languages. And it was not without the participation of Divine Providence that it was not the Hebrew original of the Holy Scripture that received the greatest authority in the Christian Church, but the most ancient translation of it into Greek, the so-called Septuagint.

The followers of this theory think that St. Moses, while compiling the text of the Holy Scripture, included the ancient legends, which had survived, checking them through the prism of the Holy Spirit, so that in the Biblical words there would remain no wrong word, no incorrect thought.

The author of these lines is more sympathetic to this second theory, for it permits the inclusion of a wider circle of people to those called to work with the Holy Spirit, mainly the antecedents of the Hebrew people, first of all, the righteous Abraham, an expatriate of the Chaldean Ur, i.e. from the Babylonian region, which also explains, why precisely the Babylonian (Mesopotamian) legends are especially close to the Biblical ones.

The narration about the Flood is only one of such legends. In the ancient Sumerian exposition there is a narration about the creation of the world, which in Sumerian starts with the line: «Enuma elish la nabu shamamu» («when the skies were still not named»), serving, according to Eastern tradition, as the title of the whole narration.

There is a stark basic difference between this narration and the Biblical one. While the Holy Bible begins with the triumphant proclamation: «*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*» – and we daily profess this truth in our Creed, repeating after the Holy Prophet Jeremiah, that «*gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens*» (10:11) and that «*God hath made the earth by His power, He hath established the world by His wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by His discretion*» – the Babylonian legends divide the creation of the world among different gods or a society of gods, showing that at this important moment the memory of the inhabitants of Babylon failed, and they passed on a radically distorted picture of the creation of the world to further generations. This reveals once more that for the sake of keeping the truth in mankind undamaged, the Lord could not leave it for human powers to keep it, and that the interference of the Holy Spirit in this matter, «Who talked to the fathers through prophets,» was necessary.

However, this cleansing effect of the wafting of the Holy Spirit we see in the narration, which more closely approaches the truth, the legend of the Flood.

Let us present extracts of this legend from the book of Dr. Georges Roux «Ancient Iraq» (London, 1964).

"Once the gods decided to send a flood, to destroy sinful mankind, but Ea (the god of fresh water) took pity on one Utnapishtim and quietly, through the wall of his dwelling, started to whisper to him advice: leave the house, leave all belongings, build a ship of great size, take «all seeds of living beings,» and be prepared for a calamity. The next morning the construction of the ship began,

and some time later, a huge, seven-decked ship, tarred with oil and loaded with gold, silver, birds and animals, was ready. Utnapishtim went on board the ship with his whole family and workers, and when the weather changed for the worst, he understood that the flood had come, and closed the door. A black cloud appeared from beyond the horizon and a terrible storm came up, with wind, rain, thunder and lightning. All the dams burst and the earth was enveloped by darkness. The gods were in a panic and frightened, they cringed, as dogs, huddled up in fear. Ishtar (Astarte) cried, like a woman giving birth. «How could I have started this battle against my people? I am the one, who let my people down!» The gods cried with her for six days and six nights. The wind was blowing, the rain, storm and flood were flooding the earth. On the seventh day, the storm subsided. Utnapishtim opened the window, light fell onto his face and he saw that all mankind was converted into clay. The ship stopped on the peak of Mount Nizir, but there was no ground seen anywhere, except for the cliff on which stood the ship. After a week passed, Utnapishtim let a dove go, but it returned, he sent a swallow, but it came back as well, and finally he sent a crow, and the crow did not return, for he found ground. Then Utnapishtim left the ship and made an offering on the mountaintop. And the gods sensed the smell of a sweet sacrifice and gathered around it like flies. Then the gods began to quarrel. Ishtar (Astarte) was glad, Enlil was angry, Ea defended his position.»

In this narration, we see both a similarity with the Biblical narration, and a fundamental difference with it. First of all the difference between the majestic and bright image of God, which appears on the pages of the Bible, and the very often repugnant image of heathen gods, cringing like dogs during the calamity, and gathering like flies at the scent of a sacrifice, catches the eye. When comparing both narrations, we clearly see the difference between the narration, which went through the furnace of the Holy Spirit, and the narration, which did not have such cleansing.

The most important feature of one or the other is the presence or absence of a moral meaning in the described event. The Biblical Flood was a consequence of the universal sin of mankind. All people, except Noah and his family, fell into hopeless corporality, had discontinued any spiritual life. We can clearly picture such a life from the example of present times. God's plan was this way being disrupted at the very root. People descended into hell, and if all mankind without exception would find itself in the same state, then there would be no hope for anyone for the eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Because of this, and not out of a momentary caprice, the Lord exterminates pre-flood mankind, saving Noah and his family and in that way,

protecting mankind.

But the Lord did not forget the destroyed human generations. The Holy Apostle Peter testifies: *«By which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water» (1Pet. 3:19–20).*

All this, of course, is not present in the heathen Mesopotamian notes.

We can only reverently give thanks to Our Lord and the Holy Spirit for the fact that He was so kind as to undertake the cleansing of human legends for the preservation of Truth. If not for this interference of the Holy Spirit, then we might have been obliged to this day to worship gods, cringing like dogs, and greedily clinging to anything edible, like flies.

This article was already written, when in newspapers and magazines there appeared the news about new discoveries in the excavations of the ruins of the city of Ebla in Syria, from pre-Biblical times. And, of course, anti-Christian and anti-Biblical attacks began appearing on this matter. The present article cannot answer the questions which were posed there, only because it had been written earlier than the news about the new discoveries were received, and because these news items are still very muddled and unprocessed. But it does provide answers to the main questions, arising in connection with the new discoveries in the Middle East, and can therefore be of some benefit.

The racial division of mankind

The racial division of mankind begins immediately after the Flood. Noah curses Ham: «*a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.*» Then he said: «*Blessed be the LORD God of Shem*» and «*God shall enlarge Japheth.*»

From this moment on, these three principal branches of mankind gain their particular features. The progeny of Ham develop special hereditary features, which are absent in the descendants of Seth- Semites, and the descendants of Japheth – Japhethites. In turn, these latter two also begin to differ fundamentally from each other.

«Blessed be the LORD God of Shem,» says the holy and righteous Noah about his oldest son. In these words, we can see the prediction about the especially elevated calling of the progeny of Seth.

And truly, the progeny of Seth are not only the nation chosen by God for preserving the faith in the One True God in the Old Testament period of history, but also, in later times, the bearers and disseminators of faith in One God and the warriors against polytheism were mostly the descendants of Seth, Hebrews (for all the Apostles, the disseminators of faith in Christ, were mostly Hebrew), and the disseminators of Islam -Arabs.

«*God shall enlarge Japheth.*» According to ancient tradition (however, very slightly based on the testimony of the Holy Bible), the descendants of Japheth are Indo-Europeans. No other human nation became so widespread on the face of earth, as the Indo-European tribe.

It is hard to create connections between the God-inspired, eternal and immutable truths of the Holy Scripture and unstable, always changing surmises of human science. But in this case there exists the desire to make such a connection. According to the contemporary archeological data all the most ancient so-called «cultures» of the ancient Stone Age in the Chellean (Abbevillian), Acheulian, Mousterian epochs were absolutely identical throughout the earth. In South Africa, in China, on the islands of Indonesia, in Europe, people equally discovered the possibility of the use of stones for their purposes, and shaping them with something into the desired shape: so-called stone axes, scrapers, knives in all the listed regions were almost identical, testifying to the common psychology of all of mankind, like, say, the nests of one type of bird, beaver dams or honeycombs of bees are about the same wherever they reside. However, the one great difference is that the nests of birds and constructions of beavers remain almost unchanged with time, but the achievements of people, while basically remaining identical in distance,

improved with time.

During the change from the lower Paleolith to the upper, there appear local variations of «cultures,» and human tools begin to differ not only by eras, but by places of inhabitation.

In addition, we do not find any signs of even the least developed spiritual life in that ancient, undivided mankind: there are no traces of burials of their dead tribal members, or any works of art.

This state of ancient mankind begs comparison with the Divine words about pre-flood mankind: «*My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh,*» i.e. there is only flesh, nothing spiritual or even emotional.

And then, suddenly, unexpectedly for science, at the moment when the Mousterian culture changes into the Aurignacian one, its members stop throwing their dead anywhere in the forests and fields, but start taking care about their burial, and the walls of caves, where they dwelt, become covered with drawings, amazing in their beauty and expressiveness: an emotional and, in an embryonic state, spiritual life of people starts to reveal itself, and moreover, one might say, starts flourishing. This is exactly what we have a right to expect from the renewed, cleansed by the Floodwaters, mankind.

In addition, archeology reveals that soon, the culture, which had been universally identical, changing only by epochs, begins to separate into individual local cultures. In this phenomenon, the division of mankind into different races soon after the Flood is revealed.

We shall not go into the very unclear and questionable topic of the origin of human races. This question is clarified neither scientifically, nor Biblically. From the Bible one can clearly see only what the Bible Itself wants to establish, that the God's chosen nation originates from Noah's eldest son – Seth (from which the word «Semites» is derived).

Ancient tradition assigns the origin of the Slavs and co-tribal nations to Noah's youngest son – Japheth, and our holy Chronicler writes: «The generation of Japheth are Varyags, Murmans (Normans), Goths, Ruses, Angles, Galls, Lyachs (Poles), Volski, Romans, Germans, Venedizi (Venetians), Fryazi (Italian merchants) and others.»

Who the descendants of Ham are, we cannot say even approximately. The Bible speaks of this very indistinctly: first Babylon and Assur are called the descendants of Ham, then Assur and Aram (the Aramaic) are called the descendants of Seth, as ethnography considers them to be.

From the other descendants of Ham we shall note Nimrod, about whom the Holy Bible says that he was «a mighty hunter before the Lord.» On this basis we can guess that wild, hunting tribes belonged to the descendants of Ham, who

long remained wild before our time. Of course, no nation, no tribe, that is familiar with the Biblical narration, would lay claim to being the descendants of Ham.

The 10th chapter of the Bible, which is devoted to the question, touched upon here, of the origin of human races, ends with the words: «These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these the nations were divided upon the earth after the flood.»

The Discovery of the Stella With the Name of Pontius Pilate

In Russian circles, an interesting discovery, made in 1961 by Italian archeologists in Palestine, went completely unnoticed. While excavating the staircase of an ancient theatre of Palestinian Caesarea, archeologists, led by Professor Anthony Frova, found a stone with chiseled letters on it. Carefully removing the dirt and dust from this stone, the archeologists read:

Caesarianis Tiberinum

Pontius Pilatus

Prefectus Iudaeae

dedit

i.e. Tiberium (the theater, named after Tiberias) to the Caesareans

Pontius Pilate

The prefect of Judea

Dedicated

This discovery is very significant. As do many other contemporary discoveries, it refutes all anti-Christian conjectures of Prof. Bruno Bauser and Lutheran pastor Arthur Drews, who stated that neither Jesus Christ, nor the Apostles, nor Pontius Pilate, nor any other persons mentioned in the Gospel existed, that all of them are only late myths. This theory found great success in God-opposing circles, both in the East and West, and in the Soviet Union 20 years ago, the works of Pastor Drews were published in multi-million editions.

But the historical discoveries of the last decades absolutely refuted this false theory, and the writer, D.S. Merezhkovsky, could present the determinations of two, as he writes, «critics, free and not suspected of being church apologetics,» testifying: «We are forced to accept the highest measure of authenticity possible in history, of the Christian documents of the first generations after the 30-s about the main events of the life of Jesus.» And more: «Our information about Socrates is less reliable than about Jesus, because Socrates is described by writers-inventors, but Jesus – by unlettered persons, almost illiterate.»

The discovery of the Stella with Pilate's name is one of the links in the chain of discoveries, which led even unbelieving researchers to such conclusions.

In the newly discovered inscription, the historians did not expect Pilate to be called «the prefect» of Judea. Ever since the times of the first church historian Eusevius, though why it is unknown, Pilate was given the title of «procurator.» Both titles mean ruler. But a prefect is a military ruler, and a

procurator is a civil ruler. Apparently, Rome preferred to have a military ruler in Judea by reason of the troublesome character of its population.

The authenticity of the discovered inscription and the accuracy of calling Pilate a prefect are now firmly established by science. Nevertheless, the British Encyclopedia still, without reservation, continues to call Pilate a procurator. Evidently, since the discovery was made by Italians, and not Englishmen, it can be ignored.

In connection with this event, the interest in Pontius Pilate in archeological literature was revived. Several interesting investigations were made concerning his origin; He was of Samnite origin. The Samnites are a Latin mountain tribe, related to the Romans, but who fought with them a long time. The family of Pontius was famous and honored among the Samnites. It has survived to this day. One of the Pontius' is married to the famous Italian movie star Sophia Loren. The name Pilate has a Samnite root. It means «armed with a spear – pilum.»

Joseph Flavius and Philonius tell about several episodes of clashes between Pilate and the Judeans. The Judeans complained about him to the Emperor Tiberius. The Emperor ordered Pilate to be more lenient to the rebellious people and treat its beliefs and prejudices with more attention.

But Pilate fell out of grace with the Emperor not because of the Judeans, but because of the Samaritans, who in spite of his ban, gathered in thousands at the Mount Harisim, having believed a false prophet, who convinced them that treasures would be miraculously revealed, that were supposedly hidden there by Moses. Pilate ordered them to disperse. When they did not obey, he sent troops against them. In the subsequent hand-to-hand skirmish, many Samaritans and Roman legionnaires died.

An enraged Tiberius replaced Pilate and recalled him to Rome for trial. Pilate was under the threat of a severe punishment. But while he was sailing to Rome, Tiberius died, and his successor, Gaius Caligula, repealed all of Tiberius' orders. The Middle Age legends about the subsequent destiny of Pilate do not have any historical confirmation, and the author of the in-depth research about the life of Pontius Pilate, the English historian, Professor Paul L. Meier, supposes that Pilate spent the final years of his life in Rome, peacefully, like a simple retired Roman magistrate. But we can by no means agree that those years were tranquilly peaceful for him. Without a doubt, he was always under the shadow of that terrible minute when he pronounced that fatal word: «STAVROFITO – *let Him be crucified.*»

Appendix

Concerning the Book of Professor Kartashev

“The Notion of Historicity and the Critical Study of the Old Testament.”

The questions, raised in the book of Professor Kartashev «The Notion of Historicity and the Critical Study of the **Old Testament**.» are disturbing and demand an answer.

The book starts with the exposition that, in spite of «the rigid historical conservatism of the universal church, in all its confessions, had more than enough, for almost two thousands years, opposed any negative, profane and critical attitude to Biblical material,» that in the end, a critical attitude to the Bible is winning out everywhere, and even «in the Roman-Catholic Church these conclusions, if they are not accepted directly, then are seriously being discussed as methodological problems, as working hypotheses, and therefore lead Roman-Catholic science about the Old Testament out of the bondage of infirm apologetics» (p.7).

Furthermore, Professor Kartashev notes sorrowfully that only in the Orthodox world these critical conclusions are not fully accepted. In the pre-revolutionary academies, «there was only some informative touching upon delicate issues in the articles of Professors F. Eleonsky and V. Ryibinsky.» Nowadays «the innovative path in science is being laid by the second young professor of the Old Testament and Hebrew Language in the Athenian Theological Department Basil Vellas,» about whom Professor Kartashev says further on, that Vellas is «the student of German science, in particular Viennese Professor E. Zelling» (p.10).

It is bitter to hear this, recognizing, that the Paris Theological Institute and the Athenian Theological Department, as far as we know, are the last independent Orthodox higher education theological institutions. Is it possible that at least they could not be really preserved truly Orthodox? Why, so many Protestant institutions of higher learning exist!

About V. Vellas, Prof. Kartashev writes further: «In spite of this one swallow, which still does not mean spring has come, in general one must recognize that the question about the passing of the Old Testament discipline through the oven of critical methodology in theological schools of all Orthodox countries still remains untapped. And such an old topic in science (?) as Old Testament Biblical criticism, still sounds like novelty for us in the East. And it is infinitely sad that our great Mother the Russian Church is now beaten so low to the ground and absorbed in the most elementary questions of simple existence «to baptize and bring Good News» that, maybe, it will not soon

ascend to those aristocratic heights of theological bloom, from which it was cast into the depths by the revolutionary world» (p.12).

Proud words. How much of the professor's pride and scorn in these words is felt towards this «plebeian» activity of «baptizing and bringing Good News,» which we, together with all the Apostles and holy bishops revere as the highest, single task in the universe, which all these proud «aristocratic heights of the theological bloom» can only serve as secondary or tertiary subsidiaries. And if they stop being such subsidiaries, but reach for an independent role that doesn't belong to them, or turn onto the crooked paths of corporal wisdom, then the Divine hand mercilessly overthrows them: sometimes mercifully earlier than the indicated disgrace touches them, as it happened to Russian academic science, sometimes permitting them to agree to Herculean columns of unbelief and insanity, as it happened with the Protestant, for example, the Tubingen German so-called theological science.

What are these «conclusions of Biblical criticism,» the lack of assimilation of which in Orthodox theological science grieves Prof. Kartashev?

They are many. In the above-mentioned book, they are mentioned in brief.

First of all, it turns out that the whole slew of books in the Old Testament is «pseudo-epigraphic,» i.e. these books do not belong to the authors to which they were assigned. But Prof. Kartashev hastens to qualify that «the faith-teaching authority of the holy books does not depend on definite authorship.» This thought is correct. The Church already gives authority to a holy book by including it in Its canon, by authorizing it, i.e. the given holy book is recognized as a book of the Church. That is why, for example, the authority of corresponding books does not lessen because their author was King Solomon, who from the «the lover of wisdom» turned into «the lover of loose women.» But this means, that the Church authorizes the given holy book completely. And for any unbiased believing person, not blinded by the proud presentation about the cultural superiority of his generation over the rest, the two thousand-year long testimony of the Church about this or that authorship, of this or that holy book, is more convincing, both because of the infallibility of its moral authority and as well as rational considerations, than the kaleidoscopically changing opinions on this question of various «scientific» authorities.

For example, for us King David is not «a legendary personality» (p. 25), created on the conjecture of the authorities in whom Professor Kartashev believes, from the circle of Hebrew scribes and rabbis of the post-Babylonian period, but the brightest, lively, living personality, whom we love with living love. Through this living, and therefore understanding, love, internally fathoming his emotional experiences as our own, we clearly sense his feelings,

when after his downfall he composed his holiest psalm, which we so often repeat in the minutes following our sinful downfalls: «Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy great mercy: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions...» And there is no way we can take these sacred lines away from the king-Psalmist well-known to us, and assign them to some unknown falsifiers of the 6th or 4th century BC, which on the supposition of Prof. Kartashev and the authorities recognized by him, so well imitated the repentant feeling of the their invented legendary king, that for two thousand years the best and most clever Christians could not guess that they penitently repeat a forgery.

We also know that this beloved by us king David also knew, and not incidentally, but as one of the bases of his faith, about the resurrection of the dead, believing in it so profoundly and correctly that we, believing the same, to this day meet the Compline of the Resurrection with the words: «Arise, O God, judge Thou the earth,» and with his words rejoice on the night of the Resurrection: «Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered...,» «This is the day which the LORD hath made; let us rejoice and be glad therein.»

We know that all the holy prophets believed in the resurrection of the dead, so that the words of the Prophet Hosea sound in the Paschal night as the most joyful expression of victory over death: «O death, where is thy sting? O hades, where is thy victory?» (Hos. 13:14).

Therefore, we are not swayed by the unconvincing proof presented by Prof. Kartashev against assigning the authorship of the prophet Isaiah to his entire book (this is a very early surmise, proposed by negative criticism), in reference to the 24th and 32^d chapters of the prophet, that it was possibly written only in the 2^d century BC, because, as he said, it expressed the belief in the Resurrection, and this dogma «began to glimmer in the darkness of Old Testament ignorance only at the end of the Hellenistic époque» (p. 27–28).

Does Prof. Kartashev seriously think that the holy prophets and forefathers of the Old Testament did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, if any religious man believes in this, even a heathen. What, in this case, would the words of the Apostle Paul mean: «But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. By faith Noah being warned of God... By faith Abraham...obeyed... Through faith also Sara herself received strength... These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them... But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly... By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac...accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead... By

faith Moses... esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward... and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection» (Hebr. 11). Is it possible that contemporary professors and the professors of the previous century know better about the faith of holy righteous people of the Old Testament, than the Apostle Paul?

From the testimony of the Gospel, as well as J. Flavius, we know that on the contrary, in the epoch, nearest to Christ, i.e. right at the end of the Hellenist epoch, the first people (the Sadducees) that did not believe in the resurrection of the dead appeared among the Hebrew people, like now they appear among formally professing Christianity.

And these people were exposed by the Lord, not even with the words of the Prophet David or any of the later holy writers, but by the words of the one, whom Jesus Christ and the entire Church, and with It we, sinners, accept and will accept as the first Old Testament writer – the God-Seeing Moses: «But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living» (Ex. 5:6; Math. 22:32; Marc 12:26; Luke 20:37).

We shall yet get back to the question about Moses.

But before that let us speak about the question, which seems to us especially glaring, about the attempt to discredit the prophesy of prophet Isaiah, fundamental to all of Christianity: «Behold, a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a son» (Is. 7:14).

This is what Prof. Kartashev writes about this: ‘Isaiah «pointed at the forthcoming birth of a son with the name Immanuel by a young woman as a sign of the mercy of Yahweh ... It is a strange, and of course, not accidental, decision by those pious Hebrew translators to translate this extract from Isaiah into Greek, who insisted on using here the unexpected by its sense for a conceiving woman and at all unexpected for Judaism word «parthenos,» i.e. virgin, translating the Hebrew word «ga-alma.» The direct Hebrew word for the definition of a virgin and virginity is «betula.» The word «alma» is wider in its meaning. It signifies a mature young woman, of marriageable age or young woman already married, in Russian -> moloditsa» (p.35).

This question, contrary to other conjectures of the professor, is not at all new. It had already appeared in the first centuries of Christianity. And the Church answered it long ago.

Truly, in the Hebrew texts in this extract of the Isaiah’s prophesy one does not find the word «betula» – a virgin, but «alma» – a young woman. This is

translated by the word «neanis,» a young woman, in the later Hebrew translations of the Old Testament into Greek. But in the first, most ancient translation from Hebrew into Greek, in the God-inspired and holy translation of the 70 (to be more exact, of the 72, 6 from each generation of Israel) interpreters, i.e. translators, done by Divine direction and specifically not by an individual, but as a unified exploit of the whole Old Testament church, in this translation, without any double meaning, stands the word «parthenos» – a Virgin. «Behold, a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.»

A key to the correct understanding of how this occurred, is given by Prof. Kartashev himself, when he says: ‘The Alexandrian translation of the 70 was accepted by the Church with love; and the Judaism, which had created it, rejected it with mystical horror and replaced by others (Aquila and Symmachus), processed in an anti-Christian manner» (p.35). And prior to that, about the Hebrew original, from which those anti-Christianly revised translations were made, the professor says: «The Rabbis withdrew from circulation all the ancient copies of the Synagogue and exchanged them for the copies of one list, which were admitted by them to be the best and exemplary. Thanks to this, unique in the history of the world literature, fanatically scrupulous operation, performed at the end of the first or beginning of the second century of the Christian era, the Hebrew text, otherwise called the Massorite, attained the most immobility» (p.17).

Only having prepared themselves in such a manner, first by exterminating all the Hebrew texts, where the terrifying word was used, having also prepared translations that corresponded to this idea, Judaism published the prophecy of Isaiah with the refutation of the Christian understanding about the Holy Virgin.

But in reply to all these thorough, scrupulous machinations, the Christian apologists calmly answered what we can repeat to Prof. Kartashev: «If the Prophet Isaiah had really written the word «a young woman» instead of the word «a virgin,» then there would be no sign in that. Young women give birth to children daily, and no one sees any miracle in that, any sign.»

A professor of the highest theological school should have known that the Church had already answered this question posed by him again, which he answers not according to Its voice, but by the voice of Its enemies.

The prophesy of the holy prophet of God Isaiah can be heard from every page of the New Testament, is the corner-stone of our faith, and we can admit this prophesy to be an erroneous translation or a forgery, either by the testimony of such ancient enemies of Christianity as Aquila and Symmachus, nor by the conjectures of new philosophers.

On page 46 of the book being discussed, we approach the main question it

analyzes, the question about the origin of the Pentateuch of Moses. The author bombards us with names of the known and unknown to us authorities of Protestant German criticism and says:

"The primary share of the work and, it can be said, of the most glorious achievements, German Protestant science took upon itself, and then – Dutch science, and with the help of the works of Eichgorn, Fatter, Evalds, Reiss, Graf, Kuenen, and Wellgausen, the outlines of the most probable hypothesis about the genesis of the Pentateuch of Moses were definitively chiseled out... It began with the literary analysis of the Pentateuch, the establishment of its multi-constituency, and then went on to the profound rebuilding of the whole historical scheme of the development of the religion of Israel, i.e. of the whole customary holy history. Already in 1834, Professor E. Reise of the Protestant Theological Department in Strasburg proclaimed a thesis, which was diametrically opposite to this scheme: it was not the Law of Moses that came first, and then the prophets, but just the opposite: the prophets came first historically, and only then the written Laws of Moses. The whole essence of the literary-historical discoveries of the Old Testament Biblical criticism fits into this formula» (p.47).

As the main proof of such an inverted rearrangement of the whole Old Testament, they point out that the Biblical books from Joshua to Ezra do not appear to know about the existence of Moses' laws.

This is factually incorrect. Even the most cursory glance at the pages of the Bible show the opposite.

The book of Joshua from its very first pages has in mind the existence of the Pentateuch and is inseparable from it. Without knowing the books of Moses, one can understand nothing in the book of Joshua. See chap. T, 13, 17; chap. II, 13 and 17; chap. III, 4; chap. XI, 126 and so on, and so forth.

The story of daughter of Jephthah, in spite of all its mysteries, has explanations other than the one, which is given by Prof. Kartashev.

In the first book of Kings, Anna, the mother of Samuel, prays to the Lord with the words of St. Miriam, the sister of Moses. During the sacrifice of Elijah and his sons, they act according to the ritual, assigned in the 3d chapter of Leviticus, and when the sons of Elijah deviate from this direction because of their covetousness and gluttony, then those bringing sacrifice expose them, referring to that, written in the Law, i.e. in the Pentateuch of Moses. See I Sam. 2:13–17. The books of the Kingdoms (Samuel and Kings), in general, are aware of the narrations in the books of Moses. See 1Sam. 2 and 30; 10:2; 12:6–12; 14:32; 1 Kings 1:50.

Chapter 8 of the first book of Samuel and 17 chapter of Deuteronomy say

absolutely identical things about the rights of a king.

Samuel speaks about God's threats for the violation of the Law in the 12th chapter of the 1st book of Samuel, basing his words completely on Deuteronomy. About the retribution for the stolen ewe lamb, David speaks to Nathan using the rule, written down in Exodus. Compare 2Samuel 12 and Exodus 22:1. The widow woman demands of David the execution of the murderers according to the rules of Numbers and Deuteronomy. Compare 2 Samuel 14 and Numbers 35 and 21 and Deuteronomy 19:12.

The Psalms are filled with references to the books of Moses from the Creation of the world to Deuteronomy. One need only see, in an edition of the Bible with parallel references, the margins of the Psalms filled with references to the books of Moses. And as a refutation of the conjecture that the Psalms are not the work of King David, but a later creation of some unknown falsifiers of the 6th or 4th century BC, the books of Kingdoms (Samuel and Kings) present in context, in the description of life of David, his psalms, which, like those included separately in the Book of Psalms, are connected in all their content with the rest of the Divine Testament. See 2 Samuel, chap. 7 and 22.

Particularly significant are the words of the 1st book of Kings, Ch. 8:56: «Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto His people Israel, according to all that He promised: there hath not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised by the hand of Moses His servant.»

Horeb is the Divine Mountain for Prophet Elijah. He knows about the Divine Testament. (1Kings 19:8). And the books of the Kingdoms are closely connected with the books of the prophets, specifically, with that Prophet Isaiah, who, as the Old Testament Evangelist (so recognized by the Holy Church), was most often attacked by negative criticism. See 2 Kings, ch. 19 and 2 Kings 21:8–15.

The books of Proverbs and the Wisdom of Solomon are filled with words from the books of Moses. But the most important thing is, that the books of the prophets, which Prof. Kartashev so categorically assigns to a time historically earlier than the Law of Moses, constantly use words from the Pentateuch.

Isaiah knows the book of Genesis well. See Is. 29:22; 41:8; 51:2; and also: 1:10; 3 and 13:19. He knows Exodus: Is. 10:26; 43:16–18; 48:21; 51:10; 63:11–13. He knows the book of Numbers: Is. 48:21, the book of Judges: Is. 9 and 10:26. About the law of the Lord (and the Old Testament knows no other Law than that of Moses) Isaiah says the words, which are particularly appropriate to remember in this case: «Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for My mouth it hath commanded, and His spirit it hath gathered them» (Is. 34:16, apparently, is related to

Deut.28:15).

The Prophet Jeremiah knows the book of Genesis. See Ezek. 14:14–20; 16и 45:62. He knows the book of Exodus. See Ezek. 20:6–14; 18:68. He knows the book of Leviticus. See Ezek. 4:14–16. He knows Deuteronomy. See Ezek. 5:15. He knows the plan of the temple-tabernacle. See Ezek. 41and compare with Ex. 26and Lev. 16:2. Also, compare the chapters of Ezekiel from 41 to 47 with the coinciding chapters of Numbers and Leviticus, telling about the building of the tabernacle and about the temple service. Ezekiel knows that priests are taken from the tribe of Levi. See Ezek. 43:19.

The Prophet Amos, whom Prof. Kartashev calls «the first of the prophet-writers» (p.55), knows the history of the defeat of the Amorites by the Hebrews, described in the book of Numbers. See Am. 2:9. He knows the book of Genesis. See Am. 4and 6:6. He knows the book of Exodus and all the circumstances of the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt. See Am. 2:10, 3and 4:10.

The words, which Prof. Kartashev cites from the prophet Amos: «I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer Me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from Me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols» (Am. 5:21–23), have a completely different meaning than the one which Prof. Kartashev assigns to them. These and similar words of the Prophet Isaiah were cited by Christ the Savior, Whom no one dares to suspect of not knowing the Law of Moses (see Matt.15:7). For every Christian who remembers the Lord's words – «I will have mercy, and not sacrifice,» the given text of the Prophet Amos is completely clear.

Bu this is how this last phrase, emphasized in the text presented by Prof. Kartashev in his book with bold type, as the one best fitting his conjectures, sounds in its authentic context: «Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus» (Am. 5:25–27).

To anyone who is unprejudiced, especially after seeing how well the Prophet Amos knew the circumstances of Exodus from the given references, it is completely clear, that the Lord is expressing His indignation, through the mouth of the prophet, at the unworthy service of Israel to Him during the miraculous guidance of its people in the wilderness, and is not saying that there was no service to Him at all.

The holy archdeacon Stephan quotes these words with precisely this meaning in his God-inspired speech at the dawn of Christianity, as stated in the book of Acts in Chap.7:42–43. Would a Christian believe the concept of the Divine Law of Prof. Wellhausen more than the most inspired first-Christian commentator – Apostle and first martyr?

The Prophet Hosea, the younger contemporary of the Prophet Amos, knows the book of Genesis and narrates the whole story of St. Jacob in fairly great detail. See Hos.12:12. He knows the book of Exodus. See Hos. 2:15; 9:3; 12:13; 13 and so on. We shall not pile reference upon reference. We can add one thing. Scanning the pages of the holy prophetic writings, one is convinced once more, how fully and perfectly the Holy Prophets are permeated by the Divine Law, given hundreds of years before them to the holy God-seeing Moses. One must be blind to doubt it.

Other words of Prof. Kartashev are closer to the truth: «All of the narrated history of the Hebrew people proceeds in a glaring and therefore incomprehensible contradiction of the most basic cult orders of the written Law of Moses» (p. 46).

But can our time sincerely be surprised at such lack of correspondence between the Law and its fulfillment? Can an outside observer of modern life believe that we possess and formally respect the Evangelic Law?

Can anyone, knowing our contemporary life, say that we belong to the Church, which professes that «neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God» (1Cor.6:9–10) and if «any one does not fast during Great Lent, on Wednesday and Friday, let them be anathema» (the Apostolic rule 69)?

This violation of the Lord's law, even total, especially by kings, even «with the incomprehensible concurrence of the legal priesthood» (p.53) cannot surprise us, especially in our time (and in all times) and cannot at all serve as proof of ignorance about the Divine law being violated by these kings, priests and people.

Unfortunately, Prof. Kartashev is incorrect in thinking that «only priests that have not read the 1st and 2^d commandments, could cultivate throughout the land of Judea, in the capital and in the very temple of Yahweh, such a bed of thistles of various heathen gods, superstitions and cults to the disgrace of «holy» fornication inclusively,» (p.59). And not only has our era, which violated all the Divine laws, refuted his optimistic conjecture. After the 6^h Ecumenical Council (the rules of Which are admitted to be compulsory for

both East and West), which in its 100th rule categorically prohibited Christians from drawing any tempting pictures, the Christian Churches of the epochs of the Renaissance and Ludwig XIV were filled with totally indecent pictures, which were passed off as icons.

In addition, in that time of weak technical progress, the fact that, as a result of the violations and lack of respect towards the Law, the Hebrew people might not have had a single full set of holy books for centuries, could diminish the guilt of the violators of the Divine Law.

In the period of greater literary wealth and significantly developed book-related technology, on the eve of the appearance of book-printing, at the end of the 15th, and the beginning of the 16th centuries, during the battle with the Judaizing heresy in Russia, there was not a single even somewhat complete copy of the Bible in the entire Russian Orthodox Church. Does that mean that it did not exist at all for the Russian people?

We know, not from the conjectures of scientists, but from the Bible itself, that several of Its books were lost through this most criminal negligence in the course of centuries.

That is why we are not at all surprised or disturbed by the story, told in the 22^d and 23^d chapters of the second book of Kings and in the 34th chapter of the second book of Paralipomenon (Chronicles), where it says, that during the reign of king Josiah, the book of Law was found in the house of the Lord, i.e. in the Temple. This was surely the whole Pentateuch, and not only Deuteronomy, as Prof. Kartashev believes (p.59). If one reads the 35th chapter of the book of Paralipomenon, the reference to which is for some reason omitted by the professor, and is not content with just the reference to the book of Kings, then we shall see that the whole ritual of the Passover, carried out for the first time in many centuries, is taken not from Deuteronomy, but from Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers.

And it is completely incorrect that «because of such confessions in the book of Kings, the illusion of the scholastic concept of holy history, the history of the long-standing existence of the Pentateuch, goes up in smoke.»

The Bible does not at all keep quiet about human negligence, even when it applies to the relatively righteous representatives of mankind. For instance, in the book of Joshua it is said that, upon entering the Promised Land, Joshua circumcised the sons of Israel, for «all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised» (Joshua 5:5). But that was the time when the God-seeing Prophet Moses, the holiest leader of the Hebrews, was their leader; the one, to whom the Law was so strictly given about the compulsory circumcision of Hebrew

children at their birth. And it must not be thought that, Joshua did not know the laws of Moses, as Prof. Kartashev thinks. The book of Joshua, especially its first chapters, is full of references to the epoch of Moses and recollections about this epoch, and the 24th chapter repeats the whole story of Moses in brief.

The Bible is also not silent about the fact that in the course of many centuries – it is hard to say how many – almost from the times of Joshua to those of Josiah, the Passover, given by God «by an ordinance for ever» (Ex.12:17), was not performed by the Jews, as well as many other things of the Law of Moses. Meanwhile, if the theory of Prof. Kartashev and other negative critics was true, i.e. if the history of the Jewish people was compiled artificially in the post-Babylonian period by skillful falsifiers, then would not they, inventing new, previously unknown feasts and other institutions, note them in the chronicles they compiled?

Professor Kartashev asks himself: «When does the Pentateuch appear on the scene?»

And he answers: «Beginning with the reforms of king Josiah, after 621, we see the influence of Deuteronomy. The whole history of the religion of Israel undergoes a sudden change... The heroic, creative work of the prophets, which gave birth first to the writing of Deuteronomy, found inspired continuers of this activity in bondage, in significant measure – priests, which can be seen in the extreme interest of the Pentateuch to the codification of all the details of every-day rituals (as if the establishment of the order of the Divine service can be interesting only to priests – Bishop N.). All this is traced back to the original source of all the forefathers' legends, to Moses, and recorded in stereotype formula, repeated hundreds of times in the multicolored chaotic and uncoordinated accumulation of various commandments: «And God said to Moses» (apparently, the professor considers that this formula does not correspond to the truth, i.e. simply accuses the Divine Law of Sinai of lying – Bishop N.). And then the moment came, when the characteristic silence about the written Law of Moses ceased. The famous Jewish Torah, i.e. the Pentateuch, immediately becomes the center of attention of post-bondage Israel. A person also appears, whose name is linked to the appearance of the Torah in Jerusalem. This is the priest Ezra, who came with the second large party of those returning in 398 BC...

As we see, finally, by the 4th century BC, we emerge onto a clear path from the darkness and unbearable perplexity of school legends about the course of holy history.

Before us is the Pentateuch of Moses (p.60–63). Therefore, all the books of Genesis, Leviticus, Numbers, and apparently Joshua as well, are compiled in

the 6th, 5th and 4th centuries. All this lively, breathing of genuine life, history of the ancient shepherds-patriarchs and the wanderings of the nomadic nation in the wilderness, attracting endless generations of believing people of reason and taste precisely with its unaffected simplicity, turns out to be the artificial invention of the rabbis of the 6th, 5th and 4th centuries, in particular, of Ezra (whose style of writing, by the way, does not resemble the style of, for instance, the book of Genesis). Really, this is a great miracle. It can only be compared to the miracle, of which other researchers want to convince us, that the image of Christ the Savior was created in the 2^d, 3^d or 4th centuries AD by skillful falsifiers. Having started down this road, one cannot stop. For the scientific authorities who speak of the artificiality of the image of Jesus Christ are not more minor than those which Prof. Kartashev quotes in support of the artificiality of the images of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph Judas, Moses – these brightest living personalities of the Old Testament. And after all, the Protestant «theological» science, which Prof. Kartashev so reverently cites, in the face of the Tübingen theologians and Drews (Drews is a Protestant pastor), came to the conclusion that the personality of Jesus Christ is mythic.

What an emasculated, armchair soul one must have, absolutely deprived of artistic and historical feelings, to come to such conclusions!

To us, both these ideas appear to be genuine insanity. Not only our faith, which is insulted by such «theological» conjectures, but even the most primitive artistic instinct, the feeling of truth and history, testify to us that the living images of Abraham and the other patriarchs, Moses and Joshua, could not be created artificially. Even the greatest writer turns out to be powerless to create religious human images. Let us recall that neither Gogol, nor Dostoevsky, were able to produce such an image. Let us compare the image of Elder Zosima and his sermon, created by Dostoevsky, with the authentic images of our ascetics, elders and their creations. We immediately see the difference between the original and the infirm imitation, even in the writings of such an author as Dostoevsky.

But according to Prof. Kartashev, these rabbi writers of the 5th and 6th centuries must have had exceptional intuition and knowledge of the ancient, primitive nomadic daily life that existed a millennium earlier, which we now reproduce only on the basis of archeological data that the writers of the 4th century did not have.

In order to understand how impossible it was for the writers of the 4th century BC to possess such archeological intuition, it is enough to remember the history of Titus Livius, which had at its disposal greater technical knowledge, in which, nevertheless, the epoch of the ancient Roman kings is

described in the forms, corresponding to historians of the times of Augustus. Moreover, let us remember our Russian pre-Karamzin historians, who described the ancient Russian princes as Russian autocrats in the style of the latest kings and emperors. Did Ezra and his contemporaries-scribes possess to such an extent the rare ability, which became accessible to our time, thanks to the development of archeology, – the ability to be transferred into a remote epoch, completely different from the modern, and reproduce it so very artistically?

Here is another reason. The Samaritans separated from the Jews not after the Babylonian bondage, but during it. How did they take the whole Pentateuch of Moses with them as their holy book, during the separation, if it was brought into Palestine by the despised (by them) Ezra at the height of their separation?

maybe, Divine providence for this reason preserved the remains of the Samaritan nation, which huddle near ancient Sychem at the foot of Mount Harisim, through the darkness of ages until now, so that they could testify to the inviolable truth of the Divine Old Testament preserved by them.

But how, in the face of such indisputable clarity, could the question even arise about the artificiality of the origin of the Holy Pentateuch and about the ignorance of ancient Israel of God's Law before the fifth and fourth centuries BC?

The late writer D.Merezhkovsky speaks about the psychological preparation for such «scientific discoveries» very well, touching upon an analogous question about the artificiality of the image of Christ the Savior and about the seemingly later written New Testament. D. Merezhkovsky writes: «It would not enter anyone's head, to ask if Christ existed, if, before asking, their mind was not already obscured with the desire that Christ not exist.» And further on: «What is mythomania? (The assertion that Christ is a myth.) This is the sham scientific form of religious hatred towards Christ and Christianity, like convulsions of human innards, vomiting this medicine. «The world cannot hate you; but Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil» (John 7:7). And it is too obvious that wherever they wanted to put an end to Christianity, «the scientific discovery» that Christ is a myth, was accepted with enthusiasm, as if they had been waiting for just that» (D. Merezhkovsky, «The Unknown Jesus»).

Of course, we do not suspect the author of the book being discussed of such hatred, but we incline to suspect the others, whom he believed, these German, Dutch, Swiss professors reverently cited by him, who invented the theory, proposed by him, many years earlier, of these horrible feelings.

The storming of Christianity is widespread. The world, which rejected

Christ, needs to destroy His deed at the root. Some could be tempted simply by the thoughtless temptation of sin, others need to be shown that all religion is anti-scientific, and, consequently, refuted by science, still others have to be convinced that Christ the Savior never existed and that the New Testament is a forgery of later authors, still others have to be made sure of the same idea about the corner-stone of the Christianity – the Old Testament. There are many such assault ladders for attacking the stronghold of Christ.

The fact that the ideas presented by Prof. Kartashev about the artificiality of the creation of the Old Testament are one such assault ladder, attacking the very heart of Christianity, is clear upon the least consideration of the question.

For Christ, as He Himself said, «Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill,» i.e. came to make it complete (Matt.5:17). Let us remember how many times Christ refers to the Law of Moses: Matt. 8:4; 19:7; Mark 10:3; 12 and so on.

After the Resurrection, Christ, having appeared to the Apostles on their way, «beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself» (Luke 24:27).

Can one presume, that Christ had a conception about the «inverted» writing of the Old Testament? The task of a Christian is to understand the Divine Law the same way that Christ did.

The best example of such an understanding, and the presentation of such an understanding of the Old Testament, is the famous sermon of the holy First Martyr Stephan, related in the 7th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Those who are interested in the topic mentioned here, should compare the conception of the Old Testament in the presentation of the Apostle Stephan and the same conception in the presentation of Prof. Kartashev. They will be easily convinced of their contrasts and will be able to judge for themselves, which of these conceptions is more logical, successive, has more historical understanding and artistic intuition.

The true church understanding of this question is still absolutely identical to the understanding of it by the Apostle Stephan in the, one might say, first minutes of the Christian Church – Its unified character and catholicity, as it was defined by the great teacher of the Church St. Vicente Lerinsky: «What the whole Church always and everywhere believes and believed is unified-catholic.» Because the Church and Church truth, necessary for the eternal salvation of the soul, cannot depend on temporary historical and geographical factors.

The Church considers only that theology, which has roots in eternity, to be Its own. Then it does not ask for any scientific diplomas from a theologian, but

Itself confers them on Galilean fisherman John the Theologian and even on the malefactor on the cross: «for while the one was led down to hades by the heaviness of his blaspheming, the other was lightened of his sins, unto the knowledge of things divine.»

The Church will never accept any other deep thinking as Its own and does not call it by the holy and elevated name of Theology, recognizing everything that does not belong to It – as mundane foolish wisdom, no matter what the external world calls it.

Protestantism sank to the disgrace of «theologians,» like Prof. B. Bauer, «Pastor» Drews and others, who rejected the reality of Christ's existence. Is it possible that scholarly «Orthodox theology» will come to such disgrace as well?

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